

Bringing Up Bobby:
Memoirs of Bobby Mac Donald
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Preface

Life is a bitter sweet pill for some. At times it has been for me, but I always thank the good Lord each day I'm on this side of the grass. My life today is fulfilled and after more than thirty years working as a cop it has been full of adventure. In contrast, when I was a young boy life was even more exciting and adventurous than my career; particularly, when I was loose roaming the neighborhood.

This memoir is vignettes of the adventures of a free spirited young boy. There are some really unbelievable times, some good and some bad that you will relate to. They will make you laugh and leave you to wonder- how I lived to tell these stories. I will also tie in some relevant commentary on lessons I learned from these exploits. Everything that happened to me in this book, whether good or bad, was a positive life lesson. Even when I came away from the adventure a little bloody from some pretty good scrapes and bruises.

To get the drift of where I'm going you must read this introduction to get my current perspective on life. I may change your outlook on living. After you read this book if you have young children you will definitely keep closer tabs on their activity.

I just completed what I'd like to believe is the first half of my life. Through a bit of luck and a lot of God's grace I have passed age fifty finished my first career and started another. My goal is to live at least one hundred years, be healthy, and still be able

to make a contribution to society. Besides, it's the only way I'll ever be on the golf course and shoot my age.

So far life has been one heck of a ride. If I wanted to make a comparison of my life to an automobile; I bet I've driven cars over two million miles, and I probably put double that on my body. If I measured what I've done to my brain, I'd triple the number. By the time I was ten years old my warranty was expired.

I grew up in a suburban household, throughout my life I lived in rented houses or houses divided into apartments. My Mom and Dad never owned their own home and my parents made it a point never to move out of the Saint Laurence School Parish, when I was a child, until the kids were all grown. I've also lived in a college dormitory, military barracks, various apartments, and single family homes. In each place I have lived, I went through roller coasters of emotion where I felt like I was living in a mansion in heaven or a self-imposed hell house. My lifetime the last forty years could never match the first ten to thirteen years of my life.

One of the realizations I came to the day before I started this manuscript was the plain and simple truth I have never taken the time to reflect on my life. Life is what this book is all about- growing up, family, love, loyalty, friendship, work ethic, leadership, management, success, failure, and many more of life's experiences.

This book includes stories of life's ups and downs, and how we should continue to use both the good and the bad times as lessons learned.

Living is an opportunity! The opportunity lasts a lifetime and consists of episodes. These episodes or life events can be excellent adventures, or really bad experiences. One of the things that made me a better person is not letting the bad times depress me, rather I

reflect on them, as a lesson learned. One not so secret lesson to successful living is converting adversity to winning energy. How many times have you heard the expression: *improvise, adapt, and overcome*? That's probably the best common sense expression the United States Marines ever came up with.

When you read this memoir you will come across a parallel story that mimics something that has happened to you. Don't be critical! Analyze the experience, try to make it a lesson for improvement, and turn it into something positive.

I'll tell you what, so I don't bore you to death, I'll try and keep this book short. I'll only talk about the first thirteen or so years of my life. You will read tales from my point of view- the inside. From the outside looking in I'll guarantee you this book will be one of the most interesting if not fascinating you have ever read.

I am going to do something very unusual. You will be experiencing my early life from a young boy's perspective with mature interpretation. I'm also going to interject future episodes of my life experiences in "*time warps*" to bring the mindset into proper perspective. You might think my mind was warped, which may be true, but for literary purpose the mental state of a writer is irrelevant.

If I'm fortunate enough to get this published, and your lucky enough to buy it, I'll bet you your money back- when you read this you will laugh your butt off, gasp in amazement, and wonder the same thing I wonder. How did I live through life to tell it?

If you have very young children, God bless you! Sooner or later you are going to face some very similar circumstances. Don't be alarmed, I survived them and even turned out to be a stand up guy. Your first trip taking your child to the emergency room will be traumatic. My parents eventually got used to the waiting room of the doctors office or the

emergency room of Delaware County Memorial Hospital. It is not that I was clumsy; I just took a lot of unbelievably stupid risks.

This book is not inspired by mid-life crisis. My wife, Frances, won't let me go through a mid-life crisis. She won't let me buy a Harley Davidson. Once I convince her that I'm Harley material, I'll buy a Sportster and I'll officially have a mid life crisis.

When I do go through my mid life crisis I am not going to grow a beard, wear a bandana or dress in black leather; but I will buy a Harley Davidson and ride my Harley into the sunset; or maybe just a few blocks to the golf course.

I'll even bet my golf clubs, I am not the only person out there that has the same outlook on life as I do. By the way, my golf clubs are for sale. I've been using them for years and the sweet spot has never been hit. Oh! If you are searching E-Bay and find a golf swing for sale, its mine, and it's defective.

I cannot blame all the bad things that happened to me on other people or make scape-goats out of my mother or father. I loved both of them dearly, and am thankful for all the sacrifices they made- for me in particular. Oh! And, of course, the sacrifices they made the rest of the family. Unfortunately, in death, parents are missed; the sad part is they are appreciated more after their death than when they were living.

The only person I can blame for my mistakes is me. It's not an accurate assessment to blame anyone for your personal, educational, or economic life's choices. Once you are old enough and wise enough to make choices of your own, you are able to improve your life or throw it away. Fortunately, most of this book is written about me before I was old enough to be wise, unless you want to count being a wise ass.

Most children have set their morals, behaviors and belief system by age twelve or thirteen.

What I am suggesting to you now is no matter what state of mind you are in it can be improved. From the homeless person without a job to the richest most powerful person in the world- there is room for improvement. All it takes is setting additional goals and achieving them one at a time. If you fail to achieve a goal set another one that is easier to achieve. If that doesn't work and you decide you are a failure in life and have to turn to drugs or alcohol to survive or become a beggar, like I once saw on a street corner with a sign, "Hopeless Drunk Need Money for Beer." I have a great idea; blame me for all of the inadequacies of your life and the world. I'll be glad to be your scape- goat. My wife tries to blame me for all the things that get misplaced around the house, even though I'm only responsible for half of them.

When it comes to what you are worth in life it is not the wealth you have accumulated. It is the wealth you have given away to charity or a good cause. Or the good deed you have done for someone else.

I know every single mistake I've made in my life; I haven't forgotten any of them. I know how they made me feel, their effect on my persona, and well being. When it comes time for me to go to therapy I'm going to take the advice of my brother in law Bill. I'll find a good bartender and tell him all my problems and get some good advice. I'll even leave him or her a tip. Besides, let the psychiatrist find somebody else to make his Mercedes payment. Maybe I can get a couple psychoanalysts to buy this book so I can make some money off them.

I'm not saying I never saw a shrink. I have for one short period in fifty years. He even made a brilliant diagnosis. I love my parents, I was never abused by any priests or relatives, I'm not depressed, and I don't have attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity, commonly known as ADDHD. He said I have high metabolism and just needed something to slow me down a bit. Fortunately, he was wise enough not to prescribe any downers, or narcotics. The truth of the matter is- the people I work with will tell you all I need to do is quit drinking coffee. Fat chance! I'll quit drinking coffee when they pry the cooling cup from my shaking fingers.

I'm just glad that they didn't have ADDHD and Ritalin back in the sixties. I would have been a drugged up zombie or an obedient robot. Think about it! Now they're treating children with drugs for ADDHD in combination with drugs for depression, and it's mainly to control their behavior at home or in the classroom. Some of these kids are only six or seven years old. Generally they are too young or immature to handle the situation their parents put them into. I was one of those kids. I started first grade at five and a half, was the smallest kid in the first grade class and was a child who never attended kindergarten. I had a lot of catching up to do. I'm still trying to catch up!

I'm not questioning the need to prescribe drugs for some children that really need it. I have met some children younger than six that absolutely have no conscience and would plant a knife in your chest as soon as look at you. I remember a friend of mine who had a two year old that awakened him with a can of lighter fluid and a match in his hand and about to set him on fire. Eventually, they found the right doctor and medication and he grew out of it. He eventually became a Marine, went to Iraq and bravely fought for our country.

In short what I am saying is- get to know and love your children over anything else in your little world, and put them first in your lives. They deserve it!

CHAPTER ONE: Reflections

Fortunately, during my early life experiences, the memoirs you are about to read, gave me a thick skin. I was able to learn the hard way and brush it off with no long term effect. I learned more from the old “hard knocks” than anything else. I rather got used to the ribbing from my brothers, sisters and buddies. Heck I was the smallest kid in first grade at St. Laurence. The sister in charge of the class had to manage 30 girls and 30 boys. Being so small I got picked on quite a bit throughout my school years. So! When I was younger I would dwell on it and even pout about it. I’d run the negative experience over and over in my mind. It bothered me then but I out grew it.

This is just an example of how negative self talk can bring you down. If I recall the incident in my mind with negative self talk, sure it is depressing. If I think of what I did in a positive light as a lesson learned it doesn’t bother me. Frankly, I usually don’t dwell on the past long enough to let it affect me. Shoot! I’m too darn busy. But! And I mean a big but. I wouldn’t be writing this book if I didn’t think life’s lessons aren’t important enough to pass on.

That is the first lesson in this book. Don’t let your inner thoughts or self talk, get the better of you. Control it! Change it to something positive. If your one of those people that dwell on depressing thoughts, change your thoughts from the negative to the positive. Make yourself laugh. It is good therapy.

The career path I chose to spend most of my life is policing. In fact I spent thirty years on one police department in Texas. In all that time I have always valued humor, or

having the ability to find something to laugh at; even in the direst circumstance. I will never lose my sense of humor. I'm not one of those demented characters that laugh or find humor in all human tragedy. I just like to laugh and have fun. I am convinced it will prolong life. Humor might be just the ticket I need to make it to one hundred years old in my travel through life.

In retrospect, as you will soon read, if I survived the first ten you would think the last ninety should be easy.

If your one of those sarcastic, sour, angry at the world individuals, you'll probably end up in an early grave. In fact you ought to start planning your funeral now; you might find it fun. This book just might be the one to change your outlook on life.

One of these days I will come to terms with my position in life. Life positions change. Where I am today is not where I was years ago, or even last week. Certainly I'll have changed my outlook on life next year from what it is, or even was, today. Whenever I have inner turmoil I can settle myself by reflecting on my life experiences and the past choices I made. The important thing is rebounding by thinking of the future opportunities I will have as my life winds down. By keeping a positive attitude while making this comparison, I cannot lose track of my life or my mind..

When I was young I was occasionally a pure friggin maniac. I was wild, had a bad temper, and was a rambunctious; know it all, little squirt. I had an endless supply of energy. I know I have a guardian angel. I consider myself blessed I have reached life's half time with my faculties intact and I'm not institutionalized. If I don't have a guardian angel then I'll tell you what! I am one lucky son of a gun.

When I refer to life as winding down I'm talking about the next fifty years. Since I cannot predict the future, I'll just have to assume I'm going live to be one hundred. I most certainly am going to try. Anyway, this book is about the first ten to thirteen years of the first half. It's a half that doesn't have a score because when you're talking about life- winning is the only option. Keeping score during ones lifetime is a waste of time. Trying to settle a score is an even bigger waste of time. For me, this is a big win since I made it this far and probably shouldn't have. I certainly shouldn't be in the good physical shape I'm in. After reading this book you might want to question my mental stability as a kid.

Sit back and relax, you are going to experience a journey through life. This won't match Dante's journey through hell, or the predictions of Nostradamus but mine will be just as interesting. I will open my heart and soul sharing with you my happiness and sorrow, pain and suffering, highs and lows, and everything in between associated with my voyage. I will share with you my appreciation for living as well as the darkness of some of the turmoil and bad decisions I made. The only way I can share it is through stories. Stories I promise you are going to be fun to read.

Yeah! The typical disclaimers are in force. I changed some of the names because I don't want to piss off my family and friends. In some of the stories I may have included the wrong friend or family member but that's not important either. Besides, I plan on winning the lottery before my 100th birthday and I don't want to have to pay it all out in a judgment from a law suit. The only judgment day I want to face is when I'm dead, disposed of, and appearing before God. Judgment day is final and a lot less expensive

because there are no attorney fees and you certainly cannot appeal the final decision on judgment day.

If you happen to be one of my friends or family members reading this, please don't be critical if I got some fact or circumstance wrong. I intentionally didn't call and ask for advice or answers because this is a memoir. Memoirs are memories; these are my memories, and I took the time to make them interesting or nobody would spend the time reading this. Did I take literary license writing this? Let's just say memories decay. Facts and circumstance might get a little distorted. For the most part, this is true. So after you read this, you may judge whether I truly was a crazy kid. I assure you will conclude what I concluded, How did I survive it to tell it?

Chapter Two: Earliest Recollections

I want to give a brief description of our family history. My Grandfather was a Mac Donald and his wife was a Forsythe. We was a surgeon in the U. S. Army and was the post surgeon at the Standing Rock Agency in the early 1900's in his diary he says there were only 500 or so Sioux Nation Native Americans remaining on the reservation. My guess is the Army killed the other half million or so ten or twenty years earlier. My father was the youngest of four and was in his mid to late forties when I was born. My Mothers family surnames were the Southcott's and Murray's. George Southcott Senior owned an elevator company and put the first elevator in a building in Philadelphia. They were also members of the Philadelphia Athletic Club where his sons George and Frank played soccer. The Murrays owned Murray and Son's builders. My mother's side of the family was big in the Philadelphia Social scene in the early 1900's before and after

World War One and just before the depression. My grandparents were friends of all the well known Philadelphia socialites. The depression wiped out the family fortunes.

My mother was one of the original Roxeyettes in 1932 dancing at Radio City Music Hall and travelling up and down the east coast. She made good money in show business but turned her hard earned money over to her mother. There is a lot of history in our family but that's not what this book is about. Someday I'll do the research on that aspect and write about it.

If you knew my mother she was the matriarch of the family and was firmly in control. I was the youngest of seven children; my mother was in her forties when I was born in 1956. My birthday is in December so count back nine months and you can probably guess the approximate date of their wedding anniversary and the day I was conceived. The day I was born was the Catholic Holy Day of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. I had a sister Mary, we called her Betsy, and she used to hang around the sisters at the Convent at Prendergrast High School, A Catholic Girls School. When I was born my sister Mary wanted my mother to name me Marion instead of Robert. Geeze Louise! I'm glad she lost that argument. I would have had to fight every kid in the neighborhood every day.

My earliest recollection of life is when we lived at 16 Park Ave. in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. When the family moved into the house in 1958 or 59' I was two and a half years old. My parents were looking for a rent house they could afford on my dad's salary. He was a delivery driver for Sealtest Dairy and worked another part time job as a taxi driver at night for Yellow Cab. My father drove the last horse drawn milk wagon in

Philadelphia and one of the first big trucks. I'll mention a little more about this later. Let me give some other family history.

Either the Mac Donald's or the Southcott's were contractors on the base of the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island. My Uncle Harvey Mac Donald played baseball for the Philadelphia Ball Club in 1927. In college he was an All American at the University of Delaware. My other uncle was an engineer. He worked for the City of Philadelphia and the State of Pennsylvania on road construction. He was kind of different. In fact in WWI he was a Commander of a Black Company of soldiers. He must have been a real pal with the top brass. His only problem is he didn't refer to his troops as blacks. He used a nastier name. Again I'll mention the relevance of this later.

As I recall, living at the three bedroom house we were renting on Huntley Road were my parents, six, of the seven kids, and an elderly grandmother. I was too young to remember how crowded it was but it certainly was too small for our big family.

The house my parents decided to rent was next to the Highland Park Volunteer Fire Company. It was a large house built of dark bluish black limestone up to the second story with the rest of the house constructed of painted plaster. The first floor had a living room, dining room, breakfast area, kitchen and a bedroom; the living room had a fireplace. I think the second floor had three bedrooms and a bathroom. There were solid wood floors throughout the house that creaked when you walked on them and a wooden staircase with a white wooden railing leading to the second floor. The third floor had a narrow staircase leading to a bedroom and an attic for storage. There might have been a bathroom that didn't work on the third floor. The house had an unfinished basement with cement walls and a concrete floor. The structure was heated by the old style oil burner

and water circulating in pipes feeding cast iron radiators. The oil burner was fueled by a two hundred fifty gallon oil tank in the corner of the basement. There was a brick wall in the middle that supported the brick chimney that went from the basement through the upstairs of the house. The basement had a back door that led to a dilapidated small green house attached to the rear of the house. The problem is if I remember correctly, there was only one working bathroom.

There was a mud room by the back door that opened to a small porch and a large back yard. The back yard had a very large red rose bush, a cherry tree with sour baking cherries, and a couple peach trees with the sweetest peaches I ever tasted, particularly after my mother or aunt baked peach pies or cobbler from them. To the rear corner of the lot was a single car garage.

My parents rented the place for a hundred bucks a month plus utilities. Do you wonder how a house that big was rented for so cheap? For one thing the house was next to the Highland Park Fire Company. The siren for the fire company faced the house and there was a large red brick five story apartment house on the other side of the firehouse. The fire siren was how the men were summoned to a fire call and surprise meetings and training. The siren or horn as it sounded like had to be loud enough to be heard throughout Highland Park. There were no pagers or cell phones back then. When that siren sounded the sound hit the house twice. Once from the siren pointed at the house and once from the echo bouncing off the apartment building. Nobody in their right mind would rent that house.

The first couple weeks living in the house the noise terrified me. Every time the horn went off I'd run off crying and hide somewhere. As time went on we all eventually

got used to the noise. At dinner all of us would be talking, joking, teasing, and passing food around. The meals were generally a happy memorable moment. Back then the family meals were a daily event. Everyone who was available sat at the dinner table and it was a family event. Only at this house inevitably during dinner the fire siren would go off; everybody would be quiet go back to eating without a word being spoken until the sirens stopped. They were pretty loud and could wake the dead. It got worse when they replaced the horn with an air raid siren a few years later.

The landlord and his wife lived next door to us. They were an older Italian couple. As I remember they were very nice and had a large vegetable garden and quite a few fruit trees. We often were rewarded with fresh fruits, vegetables, and lettuce for salads.

In the back yard the single story garage was attractive to me since I was only two years old. In the center of the garage there was a grease pit covered by old boards. To keep me out of the garage my dad told me there was a monster living in the pit.

I forget what kind of monster I was told resided in the pit. I know I never went into the garage by myself or looked to see what was down there because of the flat out fear of whatever resided in the pit. My brothers and sisters didn't help matters by threatening to put me in there when I was a pest.

The front of the house was surrounded by a wrap around porch with a white wooden railing. There was an elevated front yard with a sprawling Japanese maple tree with red leaves, offering shade over the stone retaining wall paralleling the sidewalk. I often climbed that tree and would get yelled at for reaching dangerously high limbs. On the firehouse side of the house was a narrow cement driveway with a grass strip running down the middle. At the end of the driveway on the property line was a large Oak Tree

and on the other side a small wall that retained the front yard across the sidewalk. The driveway was pretty narrow and not too many guests that parked in the drive left the house without scraping either the edge of the wall or the tree. Eventually the tree was cut down when they re-did the firehouse parking lot and built a new wall and a fence.

My parents had all the kids baptized Catholic. The funny thing- they were Episcopalian and Protestant or Presbyterian, I really don't remember which. Back in the late forties and early fifties it was safe to say my parents made a good choice because a Catholic education was free and the discipline was free handed, effective, and cheap. That's a story better told later on. The parish my brothers Brad, Mike and I went to school was St. Laurence. The church and school were up the hill across, West Chester Pike only a half block away. West Chester Pike was State Route Three and started at Garrett Road down near the city limits of Philadelphia and went out to West Chester. Back then there was an electric single car trolley that ran from the Sixty Ninth Street Terminal to Havertown and beyond. The trolley went both ways. We squashed many a penny on those tracks.

Chapter Three: Little Bobby

I was one wild kid. At almost three years old I was fearless and adventuresome. The volunteer firemen soon learned to lock the doors to the firehouse. There'd be days I was caught wandering around ringing the fire truck bells, climbing on the pumper truck, and was even found sleeping on the floor under the ladder truck. If I sneaked into the firehouse and the alert bell rang I'd get terrified running around like a screaming banshee trying to find the door. The firehouse and fireman were a big part of my early years while I was growing up. The firemen would bribe me with a nickel to get rid of me. When I got

a nickel I'd recklessly run across Park Avenue regardless of the traffic to the corner drug store, The Highland Park Apothecary and buy a pack of M & M's. I was affectionately known as the M & M kid. If there was a blond headed, wild eyed three year old, strutting alone down the street, wearing baggy shorts, loose fitting T-shirt and dirty tennis shoes, it was little Bobby. He had chocolate smeared all over his mouth and chin.

On more than one occasion I was caught walking across the street going to the apothecary oblivious to the traffic on Park Ave. There were a few screeching halts to cars when we first moved in. Eventually, I got the idea about using the crosswalk and looking both ways before crossing. That lesson was learned after one the neighbors dragged me home and told my mom or sisters what almost happened.

I'll say it again, when I was wandering the neighborhood if I didn't have chocolate smeared around my mouth and dirt stained clothes on me it meant I just got out of the tub. I don't know how my mother and sisters put up with my shenanigans. They did though, and were very good to me. I really don't have any complaints about how I was treated as a kid. To this day I cannot figure out how I survived childhood. With all the dangerous toys that we used to play with I'm surprised I still have both eyes and all my fingers. Everything had a sharp edge, small removable parts, or a high velocity projectile.

My two brothers were good to me but when I got in their way they would knock the dickens out of me. My brother Mike was three years older than I and my brother Brad was nine years older. Even Mike, at six years old, got tired of being pestered by his little brother. As a kid I think I had enough of a mean streak to get under anybody's skin. I hated my brother's cat and was responsible for its untimely death. I guess I was testing if

a cat tossed off the porch would really land on its feet. I deserved the punishment I got and was lucky Mike wasn't around at the time. Eventually, I grew fond of all types of animals and wouldn't think of hurting one intentionally.

The neighborhood was quite safe in the late 50's and early 60's. It was one big playground. As a kid I learned my boundaries, the hard way. If I wandered too far a neighbor would grab me by the hand and walk me home and present me at the door like a trophy to my mom or sisters. You can imagine one of my sisters screeching, "Mom! You're not going to believe where Bobby was!" I'd get the tar beat out of me for wandering too far. The punishments were not abusive, usually just a butt whooping I rightly deserved.

Generally, the second punishment was getting a bath because you can bet the farm I was pretty dirty. Rightfully so, toddlers are not real keen on keeping out of the dirt or watching out for traffic. If that happened today the police and child protective services would be called in for child neglect. The point is, those things happened and it wasn't that big a deal. There weren't a bunch of child molesters prowling the streets in those days. There were no computers or internet. The internet stalking pedophiles didn't exist yet.

When I got older we saw an occasional weenie wagger, but we all knew who they were, recognized their cars and stayed clear of them. For some ungodly reason I don't understand how we, as children knew who they were, but the adults didn't.

Meal times were set also. You came home for lunch every day and for sure were not late for dinner, because if you were, not only did you get punished but you probably didn't get to eat because the food was all gone. In our big family the one that ate the

fastest got seconds and the one that talked the loudest got heard. I didn't miss many meals but I was one picky eater.

We never went without food and clothing. Although I had quite a few hand-me-downs, I didn't look too shabby- first thing in the morning after I got dressed. Wait a couple hours and that was another story.

Anyway the joke is- I am lucky to be walking the earth- by probability alone I shouldn't be here. Then again, if I wasn't born, Highland Park wouldn't be the same place. I'm telling you, in the late fifties and early sixties, "little Bobby" was infamous on Park Avenue and around the firehouse.

One day I went into the firehouse and an old timer called Shorty was by the control center. The fire department had just gotten the newest technology, a teletype machine, and the firemen were so proud of it. I was poking my nose around and Shorty was showing the Teletype machine to me. The machine was typing away and he had me convinced there was a little man under the cabinet typing the messages. I used to sneak in and try and open the locked cabinet and would try and coax the little guy to come out. What a sight that must have been.

I had the utmost admiration for the policeman that used to sit in his car next to our driveway under the shade of the Oak tree (before it got cut down) in the firehouse parking lot. His police car was a black Plymouth with a single red light on the roof. The car had white lettering "Upper Darby Police Department" and had a number "8" on the door. Everybody used to call the old gray haired police officer "eight ball," nicknamed after the black pool ball. I used to talk to him but he got aggravated because I was interfering with his nap. Now I'm not saying he was sleeping on the job, after all, I was just a little wet

behind the ears kid, but he would bribe me with a nickel and I would run to the drug store and buy my M & M's. My first recollection of what I wanted to be when I grew up was a policeman. As I got older the urge stuck with me. I can remember every time that car was parked there somebody would tell me, "you better be good Bobby or he's going to put you in jail." It scared the daylights out of me but didn't stop me from being the terror of the town.

Park Avenue intersected West Chester Pike right at the St. Laurence Church and School. West Chester Pike was called "the pike" and it was one of the defining geographic lifelines of Highland Park. Going the other direction Park Ave. ended at State Rd. or Business Route One. The streets were lined with single family or duplex homes and large majestic maple and oak trees. The area in between were residential streets with similar houses and trees. Right at the corner of Cedar Lane and Park Ave. were the Highland Hall Apartments, a red brick five story building with quiet courtyard, a couple stores and Tony's barber shop. Across the street was the Highland Park Apothecary. Between the firehouse and the multistory red brick apartment building was an alley. That alley would be my stomping ground. There was a red brick wall we used to climb and sit on. I think I got yelled at more times in that alley than any place in the world.

Tony, the barber, was an older man fairly short with jet black greased back hair. He had a European accent and a dark complexion. I would assume he was an immigrant. His barber shop had three old time barber chairs. Right by the large picture window in the front of the store was a child's barber chair with a sturdy wooden horses head. This was a chair where I had many haircuts. Tony charged a dollar fifty for a haircut. I remember many a struggle where I battled Tony over shearing my curly golden locks. Tony and I

had a love hate relationship- I hated getting my hair cut and would only succumb after kicking and screaming at him. Tony loved seeing me leave his barbershop after giving me a haircut. It took my dad and at least one fireman to hold me still enough for Tony to give me a burr haircut. I eventually grew fond of Tony and his horse chair, and even missed growing out of it graduating to sitting on a board on the big barber chair.

The friends I grew up with lived a couple blocks over on Madison Avenue. My two life long friends I met at around two years old were Jim Mahoney and Pete Rausch. I am still in contact with them today. Jim's mom was one of the finest women I ever met. She kept me out of more trouble; you will discover as you read on.

I lived in a predominately blue collar neighborhood where work ethic and taking personal responsibility for ones actions were the norm. Buddy, let me tell you this, nobody wanted to hear excuses. You got out and did it. If you sat on your thumbs waiting for a hand out you didn't live in Highland Park, Upper Darby, Pennsylvania. I'll guarantee you most of the neighborhoods throughout America were like that. In addition to my two life long friends who grew up on Madison Ave. Both of my brothers have lifetime friends from the neighborhood. The most important lesson I have learned in life is about friendship, loyalty, honesty, being able to take a punch and having a good right hook.

My suggestion to you is find a good, honest, supportive friend you can rely on. Friends don't take advantage of one another. Friends don't screw each other over. When you have a life long friend that gives you advice you don't like or unintentionally makes you mad, forget about it, and don't hold a grudge. Friendship means forgiveness.

The people that lived and worked around Park and Madison Ave. would be the roll models that molded me into the person I am today. I don't know if that was a good thing or not, but it was reality. Between my parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, and friends I had excellent role models. Remember, roll models won't be perfect; they will expose you to good character traits you should emulate. Roll models are human and will often exhibit bad conduct. When you see a roll model screw up and do something stupid you're not supposed to copy that behavior. Learn from it!

Chapter Four: Suburbia

The town we lived in is a suburb of Philadelphia. If you stood at the corner of Fairview Ave. and West Chester Pike, the highest point in Upper Darby, you could see the Philadelphia skyline. Back then Philly had an ordinance that no building could be taller than Billy Penn's hat. On a clear day you could see Philadelphia's City Hall and the statue of William Penn on top. In the late fifties and early sixties there were a lot of clear days and the smog wasn't that bad. We didn't know about global warming back then and really wouldn't have cared. The only thing I knew of the environment was, if I could get at it, I used it as a playground.

Upper Darby was the same as most suburbs. At about eighteen square miles there were nearly ninety thousand residents. The township was made up of smaller neighborhoods with their own monikers, Westview, Drexel Hill, Kirklynn, etc. Most were recognized by the Catholic Parish you lived near. When you referred to where you were from it didn't matter what your religion was you told people what parish was in your neighborhood. Even if you weren't Catholic people knew where you lived by the parish. Ours was St. Laurence. My sisters went to St. Alice's when we lived on Huntley

Rd. With that knowledge people knew about where you grew up. The other two big landmarks were the Catholic High Schools, Monsignor Bonner for boys and Archbishop Prendergast for girls.

Past Highland Park, down State Road on the way to the High School is a park called Naylor's Run. The park had a creosote polluted creek that wound its way through the woods and the baseball fields. A railroad ran through the park with trestles crossing the creek. The park had beautiful trees, trails, ball fields, playgrounds and a pavilion. The park could be a tranquil place or boisterous with yelling kids playing all kinds of wild games running through the trails and woods. The most famous point in the park was Eagle Rock, a large boulder that resembled an eagle head and part of a wing. It was majestic as it overlooked part of the railroad tracks. I spent a lot of time climbing that rock and running those trails. The only thing is we usually were too young to go there without an older brother but did it anyway.

The park had its dangers for kids, slow moving and parked trains, trestles that crossed the winding creek, high voltage towers and wires strung along the tracks. Today they would be called attractive nuisances. Then, they were things you were warned to stay away from. Other dangers lurked in the park were four foot diameter sewer pipes jutting out into the winding creek. Like I said when I was very young I was not allowed to go to the park without an older sibling. It was a pretty good walk, probably about a mile from the house. Four year old legs under a tow headed reckless kid with no sense of direction headed toward the park were a recipe for a missing kid. Playing by myself in Naylor's Run Park was fun. I was scared to death to cross the trestles. I heard there were kids that were hit by trains. I was walking across the tracks and listening to the water in

the creek trickle through the rocks. I was scared to look down as I crossed each railroad ties, walking across the trestle in the center between the tracks for fear I was going to fall off. I explored for hours, missing lunch with my mom, brothers and sisters frantically looking for me. My oldest brother Brad would get one of his friends and would take their bikes and ride to the park. Sooner or later they found me wandering the trails and I was given a stern warning about the impending punishment I was going to receive when I got home. Brad's bicycle had a wire rack I sat on as he peddled home complaining about the extra weight riding up the hill on State Road to get home.

Needless to say I was missing quite a bit now and then and sometimes a kindly neighbor would drag me home or if they didn't know me they would call the police. What was funny, I'd talk the cops ear off when I bumped into one under normal circumstances, but when I was the subject of the investigation I would clam up and wouldn't even tell them my name. It didn't take long for every cop in Upper Darby to get to know me and where I lived. If the police were the ones who would drag me home, I would get a well deserved spanking.

With all the precautions parents take to protect their kids there are so many dangers that are taken for granted. The most dangerous thing for me at four years old was an unlocked door and good weather. I didn't even need clothes or shoes, There were a few times at age three or four I was wandering down the street stark naked proud of my masterful escape from the house.

Chapter Five: Almost

There are not many children that can recall their first near death experience. I was about four years old. My brother, Mike was almost seven. It was bed time and this usually meant bath time, particularly after a hard days play. First, let me tell you how I set this disaster up.

I had gone shopping with my mother that day and asked her to buy some bubble bath. There was a new brand called Soakey. It came in a bottle shaped like a comic book character. The radio used to play a catchy jingle that went something like this..."Soaky soaks you clean in an ocean full of fun... bubbley, bubbley, scrubby, scrubby, clean before your done." I don't remember the rest of the tune but it would drive you nuts listening to it. It would get into your head and you couldn't think of anything else. How dangerous could this be for a four year old? You've seen and heard it a thousand times in a grocery store, a mother shopping with her child in tow. I must have begged over and over for her to buy the bubble bath and even sung that tune a hundred times. Finally mom bought the bubble bath to shut me up.

That fateful night, Mike and I were in the tub while it was filling with water. My mother put a few capfuls in the tub and went into the other room for a few minutes. Well, I knew better than mom that a couple capfuls of bubble bath were not near enough. I climbed up on the sink, opened the cabinet, retrieved the bottle, and poured it in the tub. Of course I spilled it on the side of the tub. When I tried to get back in the tub before mom caught me, I slipped and fell, banging my head on the porcelain knocking me unconscious. I immediately went under water- unconscious.

Now picture this- both Mike and I were covered in slippery bubble bath and he was trying to grab a hold of me to keep my head above water. Mike was slipping and sliding and screaming hysterically until my mother came running. Together they fished me out of the tub, slipping and sliding on the slick floor.

Naturally by now, the whole family was in hysterics and the police were called. Mom wrapped my naked, unconscious body in a blanket, ran to the police car and the officer sped away toward Delaware County Memorial Hospital with siren blaring. I guess it was about this time I woke up and realized the situation.

Think about my state of mind. I was scared even worse than the rest of the family, naked, wrapped in a blanket, my mother crying, and a cop car driving like a maniac trying to get these two people to the emergency room. I'd bet a dollar to a donut that I was crying and screaming louder than the siren on the police car. We got to the emergency room of the hospital a few miles away in record time. The cop was probably driving so fast to get the hysterical mom and screaming kid out of his police car.

The doctors at the hospital made the very quick and accurate diagnosis that there was nothing wrong with a child that could fight, kick, scream, and throw a tantrum as well as I could. Instead of keeping me overnight they sent me home.

My brother Mike was a hero and he effectively saved my life. Truthfully, I am certainly glad he did and so was everyone else in the family. To this day, I really do not think there is any way I can reward my brother for saving my life. Then again, family is all about doing what you can for each other, and the love you should have for one another.

While I'm on the soap box here is another thing; family members have an obligation to respect that love and not take advantage of one another. Sometimes the toughest part of love is saying, no! It is especially difficult when a family member is looking for a hand out. I wanted to introduce this concept now because it has relevance throughout life.

Chapter Six: Wandering

I always had the adventurous spirit, so on this particular day I wandered down Park Avenue past the fire house and the Highland Hall Apartments. Park Avenue turned to the left and I walked on the sidewalk to the right continuing down Cedar Lane. On the few other occasions I walked in this direction I was usually stopped by this retired man named Mr. Milligan, he was an older Irish man. He lived in an older two story house with a large yard. Next to his house was a vacant lot.

When he would see me; he would stop me as I walked by his house, and ask me where I was going. He knew I shouldn't be so far from home and he took me by the hand and walked me to the front door of my house.

On this particular day, I awoke from a nap and went outside and decided to walk directly to Mr. Milligan's house. I guess the distance was about a block and a half from my house. There was this green truck in the driveway of the house. Mr. Milligan and another guy were shoveling coal from the bed of the truck into a small rectangular window just above the driveway. The window opened toward the inside of the basement and was propped open.

Of course, at the time being so young, I didn't know it was coal they were shoveling. I watched in amazement wondering why anyone would be shoveling those

black dirty rocks into a window to the basement of the house. With each shovelful of coal tossed in the window opening, black dust wafted from the window.

I guess I started to pester them asking a bunch of questions and I was shooed home. I curiously hung around a bit longer until the other man yelled that he was going to throw me in the coal bin. I got scared and ran home. On the way home I was wondering, “What was a coal bin?”

Now think about this for a minute. Do you really think I wouldn’t want to find out what these two guys were doing? Why were they doing it? And what was down in the basement? Well! I had to find out.

It was a day or two later that I gained the courage to walk down the street again to Mr. Milligan’s house. He wasn’t outside. I was sneaking around, trying not to be seen and I walked over to the window. Those windows were at ground level and some were even partially below the ground. The dimensions of the windows were about two feet by three feet.

I walked over to the window, got down on my hands and knees, and peered in. The coal was piled all the way to the window sill. I pushed on the window and it was unlocked. I could push it in and was halfway inside. Being the nosey little kid I was, I reached in to grab a piece of coal. I was a little too far inside the window when I lost my balance and fell in. I slid and tumbled all the way down the pile of black, dusty coal, and rolled onto the floor. The window slammed behind me. I probably could have been killed or seriously hurt from the fall into the coal bin.

Mr. Milligan heard the commotion, opened the basement door up the stairs and he turned on the cellar light. He slowly walked down the basement steps. I’m sure he was

wondering what was going on in his basement. There in the shadow of the single light bulb illuminating the coal bin, I was standing. I was covered in black soot from head to toe, holding a piece of coal in my hand, looking sheepishly at him.

I was surprised he didn't get mad and start screaming at me. He started laughing. For some strange reason my curiosity overcame my fears and I wasn't scared. I flat out asked him what the black rocks were for.

He patiently took me around the basement and showed me the furnace. He lifted the metal latch, opened the rusted door which made a loud squealing sound. Inside there was a loud raging fire. That fire scared the daylights out of me and I jumped back as he closed the door. He told me he had a coal furnace. I knew what a furnace was because I always pestered my dad when he was messing with the furnace at our house.

As he walked me home he told me what the furnace did and why he used coal. At our house we had a big oil tank in the basement and an oil burning furnace.

All good things come to an end. Mr. Milligan was walking me to the house where my worried mother was standing on the porch. Here was her little Bobby, covered in coal dust, black from head to toe.

I got into trouble as usual only this time my mother was laughing with Mr. Milligan. As she fretted over giving me a bath and washing my clothes she offered him a cup of coffee. They visited awhile and had a nice humorous talk.

I became a regular visitor at Mr. Milligan's house. I was never invited inside but only allowed to sit on the porch steps. He lived alone and he would offer me lemonade as we sat outside and chatted. He had a bottle on a table on the porch and drank Irish whiskey out of a little tiny glass as I gulped the sweet fresh homemade lemonade.

The old heating systems in those homes were usually a coal or oil burner type of a furnace with a water tank. The heated water would circulate through pipes connected to iron or steel radiators in the rooms throughout the house. The system was designed so the convection of the heated water would circulate it up throughout the house and gravity would allow it to flow back to the tank near the furnace. If air got into the pipes or radiators they would make ghostly noises clanging and banging throughout the cold nights in the winter. The coal furnaces didn't produce an even heat so the noises in those radiators and pipes were worse than in an oil heated system.

I can remember my father using this weird shaped key to open the valve on the radiators and bleed the pipes of air so they wouldn't make any noise. Many of the homes in Upper Darby and throughout the north still use the oil burner and radiator system.

Another story I have about Mr. Milligan was his old Irish wart remover. I was unfortunate that I had quite a few warts on my fingers and thumbs. Kids would make fun of me and I was very subconscious of the warts. On several occasions Mr. Milligan would take a raw potato and he showed me how to rub the warts with the potato skin. He had me convinced that the potato skin would rub the warts away. I don't remember that old Irish remedy working on removing the warts. It was years later when there was finally a cream the doctor gave my mom to put on the warts to get rid of them.

Back in the early sixties one of my sisters got sick. I don't remember the ailment but I remember the doctor making a house call in the early evening. Our family doctor was a well respected man named Dr. Guarini. He was fairly dark skinned and short and wore wire rim glasses. He always dressed in a suit and was very nice. My parents didn't

have the money on hand to pay him on most visits and were always on a payment plan. The illness my sister had caused her hair to fall out. It wasn't too serious and eventually went away. Try and get a doctor today to make a house call. Heck, your luck to find a doctor that is willing to take on new patients. While medicine is getting more high tech it is definitely getting less service oriented. The best service you'll get from any medical facility is the efficiency and speed they get their bill out to you.

Chapter Seven: Playing

I used to tinker with things as a little kid. I remember there was this socket in the wall of the hallway on the second floor it was just a few inches off the floor. It was for screwing a small light bulb or a two prong plug into it. I once, and only once, put my thumb in it. A hundred and ten volts knocked me clear across the room. My thumb was black and blue and I was crying loud enough to be heard over the firehouse sirens. Needless to say I never did that again. In the present litigious atmosphere everybody from the builder, landlord, and the electric company would get sued for where that socket was. In 1960 this was one of those life lessons. Any lesser kid would've ended up in the hospital in intensive care. Me? It was just another lesson learned. Shocking! I wonder if this was about the time in my life that I started getting curly golden locks of hair.

When pop got home from work between jobs he had to figure out which fuse in the basement was blown and mom had to explain why I had this oversize band-aide on my thumb. I think we kept a good supply of those circular threaded fuses on hand. The fuse box was in the basement and would blow out quite frequently when one of us kids would try and plug the latest electric contraption into a wall socket. Usually the fuses

were blown by my dad when he tried to plug in the Christmas lights or plug in the lights on the Christmas tree.

One time I was standing on the porch watching the firemen practice setting up ladders and setting up the hook and ladder truck. They were practicing climbing the ladder in their jackets and helmets. I was bored watching them and I was kicking the porch railing. For some reason I put my knee in the space between the posts of the porch railing. I got my leg stuck. As hard as I tried I couldn't get it out. I just got it wedged tighter until I couldn't move it, I tried and tried but couldn't get it out, and it started to hurt. I was a little crybaby on this one. I started screaming and crying and nearly blew a gasket. One of the firemen noticed and came running. Then everybody else came running. All the neighbors were looking out their windows or standing on their steps wondering what the commotion was. There they were the Highland Park Volunteer Fire Department dressed in their big heavy jackets, boots, gloves and hats, trying to rescue little Bobby from another mishap. They tried and tried to get my leg out without breaking the wooden post but it was solid and wouldn't budge. One of the firemen brought over a long pole with a hook on it. When I saw that I thought the worst. What's he going to do to my leg? I was relieved when he pried the post until it made a loud cracking noise and split the post and scaring me to death. Needless to say I survived unhurt. My parents were mad as heck at me because my dad had to replace the broken post and paint it. The post that was put in its place was distinctly different than the original and the paint didn't quite match. It was a permanent reminder of my stupidity.

I was not always the firemen's favorite child. Being a little boy and living next to the fire house I was their cross to bear. I had all kinds of toy fire trucks, ambulances,

dump trucks and other large steel toy trucks with wheels. One day I took all the wheeled toys and soldiers and I decided to have a convoy. I lined up all the trucks, about eight or ten in all. I was going to push each one to the bench, by the red brick wall across the front of the fire house. I moved each truck about five or ten feet, moved the next one, then the next one, and so on. The ladder truck was in the lead, the pumper, followed by a line of the rest of the fleet. I even included my large yellow dump truck. I was about halfway across the front of the fire house on the sidewalk, right in front of the large bay door, when suddenly the fire siren sounded.

It scared me so bad; I jumped up, left the convoy behind and ran home. I can imagine the firemen driving to the station seeing this convoy of toy fire engines and other trucks lined up, blocking the path of the real fire truck trying to leave the station. Later my dad went over and retrieved a box with the forgotten, lost, convoy inside. My adventure ended with the toys in the box being thrown in the basement.

There have been a lot of toy recalls today, lead paint, small parts, small magnets that get swallowed and any other toy some goofy litigious lawyer can sue to get money from. Recalls didn't happen much in the sixties. I can imagine if I could put all the toys I played with on the store shelf today. They all would be recalled. I wish I had a dollar for every piece of lead paint and asbestos I chewed on and ingested. The entire house was painted in lead paint and all the pipes were wrapped in asbestos. I used to chew the paint chips and the asbestos pipe insulation as a little kid. Today every activist environmental group in the country would be protesting, In fact they probably would have torn down our house.

Do you remember the Erector Set? It had a plug in motor, razor sharp, pointy edged, steel mini girders of all lengths and shapes. The straight pieces had holes to bolt them together. The set had steel platforms with bent sharp edges and holes to bolt the girders to. There were miniature screws, nuts, bolts, and sharp tools. There was even an electric motor with pulleys and gears. I swear I never once built a recognizable structure with an erector set. I cut myself, got a finger stuck, and damaged some piece clothing every time I played with it. Not to mention scattering a thousand tiny metal pieces across the room.

My mom's first electric vacuum cleaner was a victim to a piece from the Erector Set getting caught in the wound cloth vacuuming attachment. To this day I can remember her taking a hanger trying to snag the piece that was caught in the vacuum cleaner. I bet she knew who was responsible.

Every toy made in the late fifties and early sixties had a sharp edge, pinch point, or a projectile capable of causing damage or serious bodily injury. I had this red steel fire engine that you could sit in and ride. It had a wooden ladder, hose, bell and was pedal powered. It was heavy and very well made. I even had a red tin fireman's hat. There wasn't a whole lot of good plastic back then. I got my feet stuck in that darn thing so many times. I cut myself on the sharp edges but I eventually learned how to ride in it without hurting myself. I used to get behind the wheel and try and pedal up the slight, short, hill of Park Ave. toward West Chester Pike. I'd have to get out and push huffing and puffing trying to steer it while getting to the top of the hill so I could get the thrill of a downhill roller coaster type ride.

Anyway, I'd finally get the little fire truck to the top of the hill as close as I dared to West Chester Pike. I would turn it around and get it lined up on a crack across the sidewalk and aim down the hill, it was kind of like I was staging for start of the Daytona 500. As my luck would have it, two of the elderly lady neighbors were walking on the sidewalk in my direction as I was climbing in the seat of the fire truck trying to prevent it from going down the hill without me. They were dressed in nice dresses and were carrying bags of groceries and their purses, chatting away, their presence walking up the sidewalk were oblivious to me at the top of the hill. As I started down the hill I was peddling like a mad man screaming. There I was, a four year old kid, barreling down the hill in a steel fire truck, screaming sounding like a blaring fire siren, pulling furiously on the rope ringing the bell, racing toward two kindly senior citizens trying to warn them to get out of the way. They jumped out of the way at the last second, toppling into each other as I whizzed by. They dropped their bags and were yelling a few choice words at me as I flew down the hill imagining I was in a real fire truck. My little feet were peddling as fast as I could, the small truck was rattling loudly as the wheels hit every crack in the sidewalk, and I ended up at the firehouse sliding sideways across the gravel parking lot. The firemen sitting on the bench outside were witnesses to my reckless driving. One of them reminded me of this story years later.

How those old ladies survived that experience without getting run over I'll never know. You don't know how close it really was. I didn't know either, until my mom got an earful of what her wild little monster did this time. You guessed it! Both women were at our front door within minutes of me taking my truck to the back yard and hiding under

the porch. When mom was done I had a sore ear and a butt the same color as the red fire truck. The fire truck was parked in the garage out of my reach. For now!

Chapter Eight: Family

My dad wasn't around all that much to be the disciplinarian. We called our father "Pop." That was his moniker at home. You see, he worked two jobs, one as a truck driver at Sealtest dairy and one at Yellow Cab driving a Taxi. He also spent some of his free time at the neighborhood bar. Pop called them "tap rooms". He had his favorite watering holes up and down the Pike and would stop on the way home from work for a shot and a beer. When Pop made it home late from the tap room mom was mad; she wouldn't call him Pop or Brad, she would yell, "Bradley". When mom yelled you paid attention. Pop knew his place in the household; only sometimes, he, like the rest of us, would push it to the limits occasionally and unintentionally anger mom.

I guess this brings to light a valuable lesson you need to learn in life. A strong willed woman with fortitude, strength, and the ability to take control in troubled times is useful in a wife and mother. When you have seven kids, six living at home, and being as rambunctious as our family, a good left handed slap across the back of the head will get your attention. That was my introduction to what a wedding ring was for. Mom had the infamous, "gold band!" I've always wondered if the arthritis in her hand was really a sport injury. The sport was catching the boys doing something wrong at the right time and slapping us in the back of the head with her wedding ring. She always knew the right time and place to swing that hand and catch you in the head. I guess when you're raising four girls, followed by three boys, with an age difference spanning over twenty years

discipline becomes a challenge if not a sporting event. The winning score is when it hits home and corrects the bad behavior. I can honestly say when I was disciplined, I deserved it. It must have hit home because I went from the neighborhood terror to a pretty decent kid when I grew up.

I recommend every want to be parent take the time to learn the ins and outs of discipline. Today everyone talks about positive reinforcement and the theory that you should never spank your kids. I agree you should never injure a child and anyone that does needs to be thrown in jail. Discipline is not child abuse. You don't take away food, water, clothing, or a bed to discipline a child. Effective discipline doesn't injure a child, it corrects bad behavior. Every parent should learn the personality nuances of their child. Know what type of discipline that is effective and will correct the bad behavior. If you can read your child's behaviors and little quirks you can learn how to effectively change your child's behavior. Parents need to be patient and understanding. If you are one of those anti-swat the butt liberals you need to understand sometimes corporal punishment dealt with mercy and justice is what is justified. Nothing is worse than a parent that ignores bad behavior because it's cute. Sometimes it takes more than an encouraging word.

If your one of those parents that defends every bad behavior of your child, blames everybody else, runs to school and jumps on teachers and principals when your little angel gets in trouble and yells at everyone else that sees bad behavior in your child and you yell at them defending poor junior. I'll tell you this. When junior turns eighteen you can almost bet you'll be posting his bail or visiting him in jail.

I can imagine if my mom would have tried positive reinforcement on me. I used to have a Lincoln Log set. It had small wooden shaped logs you could set on top of one another to build small log buildings. The more Lincoln Logs you had the bigger buildings you could construct. The first set I had didn't have any plastic pieces. The set had these flat, half of an inch wide, wooden green slats for the roof. They were about ten or twelve inches long. I brought out the toy Cowboy's and Indian's. I set up an elaborate scene on the living room floor. I built a fort, constructed block houses, and even made a gate for the Indians to attack. The fort was surrounded and I was reenacting the most recent western I heard on the radio.

Every kid gets bored with their fantasy. It doesn't take long. I was probably pretending I was Geronimo fighting off the cavalry. I found a wire hanger shaped like a tore the white paper off it and shaped it like a bow. I took the green slats from the Lincoln Log set and used them for arrows. I was running around the house hooting and hollering just being a kid.

Coincidentally, there was this bill collector from the finance company my parents used to buy their dining room furniture. His name was Mr. Berman. He was a tall lanky man dressed in a suit with grey hair and glasses.

On many occasions I remember him coming to the door trying to collect money. He always showed up when mom didn't have enough money to appease him. He was threatening to take mom's furniture if she didn't make the appropriate payment. As Mr. Berman was walking up the steps to the front porch I opened the screen door. Peering out, with my best Indian whoop and holler, I shot my green arrow from the wire hanger bow and hit Mr. Berman right smack in the forehead.

I scared the living daylights out of him and he was madder than a stinging hornet. He threatened my mom with every lawsuit you could file and he even had some choice words about me. Mom really did express her apologies and promised to take care of me later. Needless to say my Indian war ended with a brown box full of Lincoln Logs, Cowboys, and Indians being thrown in the basement.

Let's stop for a minute. Remember, positive reinforcement. I can imagine mom gently sitting me on her knee and saying, "Gee Bobby that was a nice shot with the bow and arrow, but you really must be nicer to Mr. Berman." "You know you could have put his eye out." Yeah! Right! I was put over her knee all right, and the strap on my butt made a lasting impression. But the punishment was not abuse! There were no injuries other than my sore butt and hurt pride. I can guarantee you I never shot another arrow at the bill collector. Later I pulled another practical joke on poor Mr. Berman that hurt even worse.

There was another bill collector that used to come to the house. I only remember his first name, Marty. He used to whistle concocting bird imitations. He was very good and could whistle and make you think a bird was across the room. I always thought he was amazing. Even though he had a difficult job, he was very nice and respectful to my mom when she was late making a payment. Unlike Mr. Berman who left me with the impression he was a mean man; Marty was much more professional, that is, as bill collectors can be.

As I mentioned earlier, I played a really bad, evil trick on Mr. Berman. Ironically, I used a chair from the furniture set Mr. Berman was trying to collect a payment on. It was a solid cherry wood dining room set. My mother made these beautiful hand sewn

seat pads for the chairs. Right by the front door was one of the curved back wooden chairs with a hand made fancy seat pad on it. My mother being a seamstress on the side had a lot of straight pins in a tomato shaped pin cushion on the sewing machine table in the next room. I saw Mr. Berman coming and grabbed about half a dozen pins from the pin cushion. I stuck them through the seat cushion with sharp ends pointing upward. I was hoping Mr. Berman would sit there and get a prickly reception.

When Mr. Berman knocked on the door I was exceptionally polite to him. He should have been suspicious that something was up but he wasn't. I invited him in and asked him if he wanted anything to drink. I was being so nice to him and I also told him I would go get my mom. Well, there was about a fifty-fifty chance he would sit down, and the booby trapped chair was closest to the door. When it appeared he was going to sit down and he did choose the chair with the pin cushion padded seat, I very quickly left the room.

The result of that one was disastrous. He yelled like a mad man being murdered in an Alfred Hitchcock movie. I was, for the moment, laughing. Mr. Berman was threatening my mom with a lawsuit and repossession of the furniture, house, and imprisonment of me for the rest of my life. She was embarrassed since she promised nothing like the last time would happen to him again. I proved mom wrong.

Getting to the point; I literally got my rear end lit up with a belt. I deserved it and I never again had face to face contact with Mr. Berman. To be honest with you, I kind of think he refused to collect at our house again. I will say this. The furniture my mom bought eventually was paid off. It was very good quality furniture. My sister still has that same dining room set, fifty years later. Every time I see one of those chairs I think of

what I did to poor Mr. Berman. At the time and age it seemed like the right thing to do. Today, I truly am sorry for tormenting the poor man. I was, in general, a good kid but I had a mean streak in me.

I never did have much luck with bill collectors. Going forward in time, right after high school, just before I went into the military I got a job with a security company. I was working at a Lerner's clothing store on Sixty-Ninth Street. An old man working in the collections department collapsed. I heard some screaming and ran to find a crowd of employees and customers standing over this old man on the floor. He didn't have a pulse and I assumed he was having a heart attack. I started mouth to mouth resuscitation and chest compressions. I was aided by a woman who said she was a nurse and with her directions it seemed like he was getting some color back in his face. An ambulance was summoned and it seemed like it took forever for them to get there. The emergency responders turned out to be two older Upper Darby Police Officers in a van. I was trying feverishly to revive the man when they pulled me off him, loaded him onto a stretcher and put him in the van. The rescue breathing stopped there. They didn't continue cardiopulmonary resuscitation on the way to the hospital.

I spent the rest of my shift wondering what happened to him when I got the word. The poor fellow died on the way to the hospital. Shortly after that episode my tenure as a security guard ended. I kind of think the manager blamed me for not saving the guy.

I don't know what effect the entire bill paying, collecting scenario had on my life, but I can honestly say this. Up to today, I have never defaulted on a debt, and always pay my bills on time. Besides, I don't own any pin cushion chair pads and really do not want to have another bill collector die after I give them CPR.

Getting back to Family, my brother Mike was two years older than I he was blond haired like me but a lot more mellow. He was a taller gangly kid and very athletic compared to m. My oldest brother Brad, named after my dad, we called him Butch, a nickname that stuck through High School. Brad had dark black hair and was a pretty good sized kid. He was nine years older than me and I didn't see much of him. He was very involved in sports and the Church. In fact after he graduated from Monsignor Bonner High School he went into the seminary for a few years. Brad and his friends were a close group. They drank beer now and then when they got into their late teens but I never remember Brad getting into trouble. I remember one time Brad was going to Westview Park to play basketball. I bugged him into taking me along. He rode his bike and I got on the back rack. He met up with his friends and had a friendly game with some of the Westview kids. On the way home, with me riding on the back of the bike he took a corner and the heel of my foot got jammed into the spokes and I got cut. It wasn't that I was hurt that bad it was the screaming and crying I did all the way home that irritated him. It's not that Brad and I were not that close it was the age difference that kept us from seeing each other until mealtime.

I had four sisters. My sister Marge got married when I was two. She is twenty one years older than I. The next in line is my sister Florence; we called her Flossie and then the next youngest was Marilyn. She was closest to me of all my sisters but she had some unusual quirks. First she had a Rheumatic heart disease and the second was she loved her soap operas. The youngest of the girls was Mary, her nickname was Betsy. She was a little different. The best way to describe my sisters, with the exception of Marge is to compare them with the girls on American Bandstand. They even made a few appearances

on the show. The one thing I will never forget was the arguments my sisters had over which skirt, blouse or sweater belonged to who. I bet they never argued over panties.

Chapter Nine: Being a Kid

As a kid I was always getting into situations, which usually meant trouble. One day I was rooting around and I found a serrated two sided fruit peeler. Not thinking I stuck the peeler in my pocket. I went over to Cedar Lane a block away and was running around playing with the kids on that block. I had this peeler in my pocket and eventually poked a hole in my shorts. One of the kids was making fun of me. Being a rambunctious little squirt, I took out the peeler and threatened to peel the hide off of the kid. Well he went home and told his parents, who in turn called the police. I think I was about five or six years old and I was already running from the cops. When they drove up to where I was standing I threw the peeler in the air and ran away. They must have gotten a good laugh. The police officer did find my house and have a good conversation with my mom. In turn, a belt did a behavior conversion on my butt. Time and a few apologies later healed all wounds and I was friends again with the kids on the next block.

One of the worst things a bunch of bored kids can find is a rope and two tall trees with a street between them. On Cedar Lane there were these two majestic oak trees that were directly across the street from each other. One of the older kids suggested we string the rope between the two trees. We did and the rope was about eight feet off the ground. There were many trucks that used the street. We were betting on who would let go of the rope first. Would it be the older boy, Pat who was across the street, or stupid me. We wanted to see when a large truck went by who would hold on to the rope long enough to be lifted off the ground. Unbeknownst to me Pat tied his end of the rope to the tree. I was

waiting for a truck to drive down the street. I was holding onto the rope looped over a branch about fifteen feet off the ground. A large panel truck came barreling down the street and the top of the box caught the rope and stretched it. I was immediately lifted off my feet and pulled into the air. Just before I was yanked head first into the tree branch I let go of the rope and fell about ten feet to the ground. I wasn't hurt and the truck driver must have heard the commotion of the five or so kids yelling and he slammed on his brakes. He skidded to a stop. We left the rope behind and all took off running. The driver was left in the street looking around to see if he hit a kid. He saw the rope and took the time to take it down. He also took it with him. I'll never forget the trouble Pat got into for taking his dad's rope, losing it to a stupid prank. I remember Pat coming around later beating the crap out of me blaming me for losing the rope. Apparently, the rope was fairly expensive and belonged to his father. Frankly, it was transference. Pat got his butt beat by his dad and he later beat the crap out of me.

Children will misbehave and a parent must step in and correct the behavior. Many times when a parent disciplines a child they take out their problems and anger issues by venting on a child. My mother never did that. She raised seven children and she disciplined with an even hand. It was the odd hand across my butt I cared about.

My parents had an old green car. I think it was a Plymouth but I really don't remember. It was a bomb and was broken down a lot. The car had a lot of wear and tear and if I remember correctly it was well used when they got it. I think the car spent more time being repaired than being driven.

My older sisters used to take the car down to the Jersey Shore to go to the beach and the dance clubs at night on the weekends when they were not working. There were

more times than I can remember that they took the car, bald tires and smoking exhaust for the two and a half hour drive. There were many times they were stranded because of flat tires or engine failure. Pop would have to borrow a car and some helping hands to pick them up and tow the car.

Pop didn't take the car to work so he could save on gas money and parking fees. He used to take public transportation but he would walk a couple miles to the 69th Street Terminal to save on "carfare". Then he would take the "El" for elevated train which was the commuter train into Philly. My older brother Brad, when he was a little kid before I was born, used to walk a block behind and follow Pop down West Chester Pike. Brad came up missing a few times and the police used to bring him home. Back in the fifties and sixties the police were a little less busy than they are today and didn't get too angry for the chauffeur service. They also became quite acquainted with the family.

Pop used to go to the hardware store and he'd take me along. The marching orders from Mom were specific. "Brad, do not stop at the bar." Mom was right; the bar was no place for children. Well, after Pop ran his errands, he'd take me into the bar. Pop would make me promise not to tell Mom that we stopped at Barney's, a corner bar on West Chester Pike. I was always bribed with a soda, pretzels, and often got a nickel to keep me quiet. After we got home Mom would pull me aside and ask if we went to the bar. As I promised, I lied, and told Mom we didn't go to the bar. The only problem was Pop got exposed at dinner when I asked him why he was drinking out of such a tiny glass. Boy, Mom had a few choice words for Pop and everyone in the house had a good laugh. My older sister Marge always used to say, "out of the mouth of babies."

I remember Pop's favorite haunts were all along 69th street, West Chester Pike, and State Road. By the time I was seven I think I made it to all of them. I was quite the celebrity bar runt. I guess the taste for fine red wine and cold beer I developed later in life came by me righteously. After all, children will try to be like their parents.

Pop was a good man and always made an extraordinary effort to keep food on the table and clothes on our backs. My dad was born in 1911. He did not have a high school diploma and went to work after his sophomore or junior year in high school. Pop had a tough childhood. His father was a military doctor and divorced his mother. Pop's father abandoned the family. Pop's mother was often sick and was addicted to laudanum. Pop, his two brothers and a sister had to fend for themselves and take care of their mother. Pop, being the youngest, took a job. His brothers Harvey and Charlie had already secured careers in the military and had college educations.

Pop's brother Charles was an engineer. As I mentioned earlier and it is worth repeating he was a World War I military officer and commanded a company of black soldiers. His war exploits are not known to me and it's probably a good thing. The first time I heard of a black person being called a derogatory name it was from Uncle Charlie. He also didn't like Italians, Jews and he had a few choice words for Catholics also. He was so mad at my mother and father when she had Marge my oldest sister baptized a Catholic. Uncle Charlie was a tall thin man but he had his peculiarities. Aside from being intolerant of people he was the tightest, cheapest, miserly person in the family.

Mom told me a story about how pop had a business. He owned an advertising distributorship for print advertising. He had quite a route. The story was that Pop's

brothers took him for every dime he made; my guess is they drank all of his profits. Eventually he went out of business and went to work at his two jobs.

Chapter Ten- Some Family History

Pop met my mother, Florence, when he was a manager for the 69th Street movie theater. He used to let her and her sisters in the movies for free. Sometime around 1932 my mother was about nineteen years old and she was a professional dancer with the Roxyettes. They were the predecessor of the famous Rockettes from Radio City Music Hall. Bradley and Florence fell in love, married, and settled near West Philadelphia eventually moving to Upper Darby.

As a professional dancer mom and her friends from the dance troupe would take on private gigs. During prohibition mom and her fellow dancers would perform at speakeasies. They were secret, private clubs owned by gangsters who sold alcohol illegally. Most of the speakeasies also offered gambling and were controlled by organized crime.

One of the stories that circulated around the family was about a mansion on City Line Avenue owned by a gangster, Mickey Duffy. The mansion was on a corner and was a large three story home covering half a city block. Mom and other dancers from the Roxeyettes were hired to work at an illegal club called a speakeasy in the basement of the mansion. They would perform dancing and vaudeville acts until the early morning hours. They were often chaperoned and worked in groups for safety reasons but they made pretty good money. Mickey Duffy had bodyguards who carried guns. There were some gang wars during prohibition with the Irish gangsters and Italian mobsters fighting for

each others turf. Mickey Duffy was possibly the first man ever murdered in Philadelphia by a Thompson sub machine gun.

Mom made pretty good money during those days. Mom used to tease pop about when they met because she made more money than he did. Mom also complained that her mother took most of her earnings and she only got enough money for carfare and to eat.

Pop, when he worked for Sealtest, used to brag about delivering ice cream to the Navy Yard and having to carry ice cream to the submarine at the pier. For some reason pop was unable to serve in World War II but he was proud of the work he did. He also used to bring home big buckets of ice cream for the kids to indulge themselves in.

Sometime during my childhood there was a family turmoil because pop lost his job. For a man that never missed a single day of work, and often worked two jobs, I can only imagine how traumatic that was.

When you're young you didn't realize the trials and tribulations your parents went through. Of course, parents didn't burden their children with their problems. They usually held those conversations in private. When there was a controversy you didn't put your two cents in. If you spoke out of turn you were scolded with, "children should be seen and not heard."

As hard as pop worked there were times when he needed financial assistance from his brothers. His brother Harvey the former All American baseball player for the University of Delaware and former pinch hitter for the Philadelphia Phillies in 1927 was a prolific gambler, usually had cash on him and he would bail pop out. I recently saw a copy of his contract; Uncle Harvey was paid five hundred dollars a month to play for the Philadelphia Ball Club.

My Uncle Harvey was quite a character. He was a bald headed robust man with a big belly. He was always smoking a cigar. Uncle Harvey worked for the Bell Telephone Company until he got caught hooking up phone lines for some bookies illegal gambling operation.

Uncle Harvey would often buy wood for the fireplace and heating oil for the furnace. Truth be known, I learned later in life that Uncle Harvey, as much as he helped pop, took advantage of him and threw his kindness back in his face, embarrassing pop at the most inopportune times.

Uncle Harvey used to spend quite a bit of time with me. He taught me how to play gin rummy and five-hundred- rummy. Thanks to Uncle Harvey I learned how to deal from the bottom of the deck and deal myself two cards instead of one. He also showed me how to discard two cards without being caught. What I'm saying is- he taught me how to cheat at cards. I was pretty crafty too.

I'll never forget the time I was playing poker with my brother Brad's buddy Ed Travis. The stake was for pennies. I was the dealer and I dealt myself a hand from a pinochle deck, switched out the deck and dealt him cards from a regular deck. The card design was the same. If you are not familiar with a pinochle deck it only has cards higher than a ten. I had some great hands, and didn't lose a single one until he caught me. I remember he tickled me until I almost wet my pants. Travis was a good sport and let me keep the pennies.

I remember Uncle Harvey brought home a used pool table from a bar and put it in the basement. If my information is correct he probably didn't pay for it, because it was probably a collected gambling debt as Uncle Harvey was a notorious gambler. He was

also not a man to stiff on a bet, if you know what I mean. Uncle Harvey was a heavy drinker. He would drink Seagram's VO by the glass full and wash it down with beer. One thing about him he could hold his liquor. From the time I was a little kid until Uncle Harvey died he drank a quart of Seagram's VO a day.

There were some hellacious pool games in the basement with a lot of hard drinking and gambling. If the walls of that basement could talk you'd get some great stories. The times I remember about pop and Uncle Harvey were good times. My mom on the other hand had to put up with drunkenness and pop's bad hangovers the next day. My mother took control on occasion and didn't put up with the partying for long. She'd send Uncle Harvey packing and toss out his fifth of Seagram's VO. She found the hiding place in the basement where the ashes from the fireplace upstairs would settle. There was a metal door with a foot deep hole where he hid his booze.

Pop was a great pool player. He told me he once won a pool tournament in New York City where he ran thirty-nine balls in a row playing straight pool. He won a real expensive pool stick autographed by Roger Greenleaf, then the reigning world billiards champion. He later sold the stick to put food on the table. I know why pop couldn't be a winning pool hustler, winning gamblers don't drink. When pop played pool he drank.

Pop used to let Brad and his friends drink beer and play pool in the basement. Brad was probably sixteen or seventeen. His friends would show up and I would sneak down to the basement and pester them. Brad's friends were all great guys. Brad didn't have any bad friends. I will say this- the one guy I admired more than anybody was Brad's friend Ed Travis. He was the biggest kid in the group, had a great booming laugh, had a great sense of humor and would give you the shirt off his back.

When Ed was a freshman at Monsignor Bonner High School he was the toughest kid in the high school. He was tall, strong, had a great personality, and could fight. According to Brad it was around the end of the first semester and Travis had been in a lot of fights with seniors and whipped all the challengers. Eventually he stopped getting into fights. The only person to kick Ed's butt was the priest in charge of discipline at Bonner. The priests at Bonner were tough. Out of respect for ones self, family, and the morals you were taught, you didn't raise your hands to the priests at Bonner. If you misbehaved and had a whooping coming- you took it.

Pop liked Brad's friends and he loved Ed Travis like a son. Pop had a limit though; they were fine until the guys ran out of beer and drank pop's.

I learned to play pool at a very early age and was quite an accomplished pool player. I would stand on a milk crate and shoot left handed. My Uncle Harvey was left handed and he taught me the finer aspects of the game. Pool in the sixties was quite a different game; it was before the game of nine-ball was exhibited on television and changed the competitive nature of the game. We played straight pool and eight ball sometimes until late at night. Uncle Harvey once had some green felt covered rubber bumpers crafted to block the pockets so they could play an odd game called three-cushion- billiards.

Chapter Eleven- My Take on Family Times

Before television came along we used to listen to radio. The old radio shows like the Lone Ranger, Amos and Andy and Orsen Wells. We got our first television when we lived on Park Avenue. I must have been around five or six years old. Mom, Pop, Uncle Harvey, Brad, Mike, my sisters, and I all crowded around this black box with a small

screen. It was made by Phillips; the screen was somewhat round, about twelve inches in diameter, and the picture was black and white. They used to have to use rabbit ear antennas to get a discernable signal and spent what seemed like hours to get it working. I was like every other kid in America who had a television; the Lone Ranger was my favorite television show.

I would grow up watching Gene London, Sally Star, and Captain Kangaroo. My favorite shows were cartoons. The black and white cartoons could keep your attention for hours. Mister Rogers was another show I grew up with. Television was pretty primitive back then and there were no special effects. Just good old fashioned acting backed up with fast and furious piano playing and music.

We eventually got a bigger television. I'm not certain but I think Uncle Harvey paid for it. Pop never played golf in his life but he used to sit in his easy chair and watch it on Sundays. Pop would settle down in the chair, a six ounce glass of beer in his hand, with a quart bottle of Schmidt's of Philadelphia beer on the floor. I used to sneak his beer and take swigs off of it. I was probably four or five years old the first time I tasted beer. There were a couple times I got schnockered. The first time I drank enough to be intoxicated I was six. Its not that I was allowed to drink, or that I drank a lot. I just remember on occasion pop passed out in the chair and I'd drink his beer. Of course when I got caught pop got into big trouble with mom. There were many nights pop was getting yelled at by my mother.

This one night we were asleep and the yelling started. Mike and I sneaked to the stairs and watched through the railing. Mom had hit Pop in the head with an empty beer bottle and it didn't take long before the police were standing in the living room. They

talked for quite a while to both of them and they left. All was quiet for the rest of the night. When mom got mad she started yelling at pop; it used to scare me when my parents fought. I didn't have a clue what was happening and why. Fortunately, I can only remember a couple of domestic violence episodes when I was young.

There were a couple times Mom rounded us up and took us to a relative's house for the night. Mom always forgave Pop and would come back. Every single domestic issue around our house was instigated by Pop's drinking.

Today, domestic abuse is out of hand. It touches families in all economic walks of life and all age groups. Teenagers are getting involved in serious violence with each other over relationships, and it is an epidemic. Parents are not teaching their children how to conduct themselves on dates. Parents are not teaching their kids conflict resolution. My suggestion to parents is set the example. Don't argue in front of your children. Treat each other with respect. Lead the emotional growth of your children by living the example. You only get one chance to raise a child. You'd think parents would try and do it right each time for each child. The most important thing in life are the children we bring into the world. Yet thousands of children are neglected, abused, and subjected to intentional starvation.

My father may have drank too much but he never abused any of us kids. He may have spoiled us on occasion, but he never took advantage of any one of us. There's more to the story but I'll talk about that later. Pop was the breadwinner but Mom was the backbone of the family. My brothers and sisters were the secondary support system.

My dad loved to decorate the house at Christmas time. The Christmas lights had cloth covering the copper wire. These were some really old strings of lights. Pop would

splice the sets together and like I said before he blew a lot of fuses. We always had a nice Christmas tree. The tree often had homemade decorations and we always overdid it with tinsel icicles. I loved Christmas.

Pop used to set up this train set under the Christmas tree. I think they belonged to my brother Brad. The train set was called Lionel. The cars were pretty good size. The tracks had to be clipped together perfectly to keep the trains on the track. The engine was powered by one hundred and ten volt household current. There was this big black box with a knob that controlled the current to the track, which in turn controlled how fast the train would go. If the train left the track you had to turn off the current before you put it back on the track. If you put your fingers across the tracks you would get the shock of a lifetime. These trains were quite dangerous. The engine even came with a smokestack where you put a small tablet. The tablet was heated and gave off smoke as the train chugged around the track. I was given explicit instructions not to touch the trains. When Pop wasn't around the transformer was left unplugged.

The last thing you want to tell me, of all people, is not to touch something. The trains were set up in an oval under the Christmas tree. There was an elaborate array of realistic looking buildings and train station. The train had box cars, flat cars, a passenger car and a caboose. There was a coal car behind the engine. The trains were pretty easy to connect as long as the wheels were aligned properly on the tracks. I sneaked into the living room plugged in the train set and started running the trains. Needless to say, it wasn't long before I derailed the engine and had to put it back on track. I picked up the engine with my two tiny hands, put my fingers on either side of the wheels of the engine, and tried to put the engine back on the track. Zwap! I got shocked, knocking me with the

engine in my hand, backward across the room onto the floor. I forgot to turn off the switch. There was smoke coming from the transformer and the wall socket. Fortunately, the fuse blew and the contact I had with the electric current was brief. For some reason electricity was my adversary growing up. I truly wonder if anyone ever owned a Lionel one hundred and ten volt train set and didn't get shocked. I'll bet there were a few electrocutions from those trains.

My tenure as conductor of the *Little Bobby Express* was short and I didn't go near the trains for the rest of the Christmas season. We had a great time around our house at Christmas, particularly at dinnertime.

I can remember my mother, Aunt Marg and my mothers other sister Aunt Lillian feverously working in the kitchen cooking a turkey, ham, mashed potatoes, gravy, vegetables and fresh dinner rolls. My mother made the best turkey and gravy. For dessert she would cook either bread pudding or rice pudding. Her bread pudding would be in a large five gallon pot. I'll never forget the time my brother, Brad was trying to get the pudding pot off the stove and he dropped it, the entire contents of the pot went all over the kitchen floor. What a mess that was. We had a good laugh over that one.

Dinner was sometimes a fifteen person affair with us kids banished to the card table in another room or at the end of the table. The proudest day is when you graduate to the main table. We had fun at those dinners the stories, arguments, kidding and ribbing and most of all the good food.

Chapter Twelve- More on Family

My mother was a fine woman and the boss of our household. She was a Southcott. Most of the Southcott's in Philly were still in the elevator business and some of my cousins still work in the business.

There were five children in my mother's family. She had two sisters and two brothers. I never met her parents. In fact, the one thing I missed in my life was not having or remembering my living grandparents. The only grandparent I knew or remember was my father's mother and she was always sick. This was one disadvantage I had growing up; I missed not having a relationship with grandparents.

My mother's oldest brother was George Southcott. Mom referred to him as Brother. His son George Jr. was nicknamed Buddy. My cousin Buddy was an all star quarterback for West Catholic High School in Philadelphia. When Buddy was a senior in high school the only other quarterback in Pennsylvania high school football rated higher than Buddy was Joe Namath. Buddy opted out of a college football career and married, settling for a career in the elevator business. Buddy and his wife Carol are still together and raised their children in Ashton, Pennsylvania. My brothers, Buddy and I often play golf together. The reason I mention Buddy here is the importance of family.

As long as I can remember any time there was a family function of any importance Buddy was in attendance. He is a strong believer in the importance of family, work ethic, self respect, and being responsible. I have never heard Buddy prejudice anyone and he always offered an encouraging word. He is a proud father and grandfather. I truly believe one of the biggest problems we have in our society today is the lack of

emphasis on the importance of placing ones family first over personal needs. This is one lesson my parents, older sisters, and brothers taught me.

Mom was a thin woman with sharp attractive features. The only distraction from her beauty was her distinctive nose. It was called the Southcott nose which was larger and pointier than usual. She was a stately woman with a very outgoing personality. Mom had dark hair with a touch of gray. She wasn't very tall, but she was very limber for her age. As mom got older she seemed to shrink more than most. My theory is- it is not old age that kills us. It is gravity and time. Gravity keeps tugging at you over time, making you shorter, pulling you closer to the ground until you're eventually six feet under.

Mom was in her mid-forties when I was born. I came along late in her and pop's life. I guess my brother in law, Jim, was right when he said I was an anniversary baby. I was born in December and their anniversary was in April. You do the math. I truly am lucky to be here. Life is great!

My mother was a generous person and would always allow guests into our home. When people were going through hard times' mom offered them a place to stay and food to eat. I'll tell you about some of the houseguests later.

Mom was an extremely talented seamstress. She used to sit at the sewing machine for hours on end making clothes from paper patterns. Mom's craftwork for making dresses was as good as, or better than, any store bought dress. She used to make dresses for baptisms, communions, and confirmations. She used to sell the dresses, but knowing my mother, she didn't charge nearly enough money to make it financially worth while considering the time she put in. Mom had more requests for dresses than she could possibly fill. To this day I do not know how she could cut all that material and work on

the sewing machine for hours at a time with the arthritis in her hands bothering her. Her arthritis disfigured her fingers and affected all of her joints.

One of those customs that always puzzled me, I never understood, was why boys had to wear white dresses when they were baptized. I guess it was a Catholic thing.

Even as a very young boy I learned a very valuable lesson. You did not bother my mother early in the morning until after she had her coffee and her first cigarette. This was a rule that was written in stone. If there were eleven commandments the first one would read. Thou shalt not bother mother before Maxwell House and Phillip Morris.. Mom drank instant Maxwell House coffee. Now I can remember quite a few cold mornings when the coffee jar was empty and I had to take a dollar and run, I literally mean run, to the grocery store and buy a small jar of coffee. It is truly amazing how my mother's personality would change after a cup of coffee in the morning.

Mom sacrificed a lot to make sure the family had everything we needed from food, clothing, and discipline, to a good education. Back in the early sixties mom smoked. The price of cigarettes was a lot less then than today and they weren't as regulated. Granted, mom smoked Phillip Morris non filters and she wasn't about to give you her last thirty two cents, unless it was to go to the store if she needed a pack of cigarettes. I do remember one time when money was tight and she and my sisters were scraping together money to buy food for dinner. She would send one of the older kids to the store with her last dollar and some change to get a loaf of bread, four cans of Campbell's bean with bacon soup, and a pack of cigarettes. Of course, she had to write a note to the grocer indicating the cigarettes were for her. You know the bean soup dinner

with bread for dipping was a pretty good meal. Mom was a professional at always having a good hearty meal for dinner.

I was a picky eater. It seemed on every Monday night we had ham and cabbage for dinner. Mom would take the ham butt, cabbage, and boil them in a large pot. She would boil potatoes and make stewed tomatoes for a topping. I hated the cabbage and stewed tomatoes, but loved the ham. When mom made ham and cabbage Uncle Harvey would always seem to be present for dinner.

Another famous meal at our table was when mom made leg of lamb. Back then lamb was a poor man's meat. Today it is expensive. Mom would bake the lamb, make homemade gravy, mashed potatoes, and serve it with mint jelly. She made the best lamb I ever ate. Mom sure could cook. Another frequent dinner guest was our Aunt Marguerite she was a special person.

Chapter Thirteen Miscellaneous Stories

Aunt Marg, as we affectionately called her, was a spinster. She was a nurse or nurse's aid and worked for a Christian hospital. She was a volunteer during World War II and volunteered to help the veterans after the war. Aunt Marg always said the war was the reason for her not falling in love and getting married. She had a rare disorder called myasthenia gravis which left her legally blind. Aunt Marg was even thinner than mom and seemed very frail. She had a reddish brown hair, wore thick glasses with one side of the frame having a crutch to hold her eye lid open. I remember that Aunt Marg helped out our family when she could. I don't know if she was a burden on mom or if she helped out financially. It really doesn't matter though because as I remember all of my brothers, sisters and I loved Aunt Marg dearly.

She had a bell collection and eventually convinced my mother to start collecting bells. Today, I have hundreds of bells in boxes in my garage. Some are several hundred years old. I haven't a clue what to do with them. Everyone in the family asks me if I still have them but nobody wants them.

Since I'm on the topic of Aunt Marg I want to talk about stubbornness. People by their very nature can get so stubborn that they forget about all sense of reason. Aunt Marg had a life long friend Miriam Waddington. She was an heiress, being a member of a family that founded a major bank in Philadelphia. Mrs. Waddington was very wealthy. She was good to Aunt Marg and they went everywhere together. They always said how they loved each other like sisters. Aunt Marg and Mrs. Waddington both collected bells. They were both members of the colonial chapter of the American Bell Association and attended meetings together. I'm not so sure they were not founding members. Aunt Marg eventually started writing articles about bells for a collector's magazine and was unofficially one of the most knowledgeable persons on the history of the Liberty Bell. I'm probably a little ahead of myself here, time wise, but this story is pertinent.

One day my Aunt Marg and Mrs. Waddington were sitting together talking and they got into a discussion of who started collecting bells first. The discussion turned into an argument with Mrs. Waddington and Aunt Marg getting mad at each other. You would think something so trivial would blow over pretty quickly. Not this time, it went farther than that. Neither one, spoke to the other, for the rest of their lives. How stupid was that? Not even my mother could negotiate a truce between them. There may have been some underlying animosity I'm not aware of but this is the story as I remember it.

In the Highland Hall Apartment building, next to the barbershop, was a grocery store and butcher shop owned by a guy named Ed. Mom would drag me to Ed's and she would do a little shopping. I used to walk around the store and invariably knock something over. If there was a stack of cans I'd pull out the middle can and the stack would crash to the floor. I'd make a mess and would be accosted by the owner. I think there was kind of a routine with me and Ed. I'd make a mess and Ed would have to clean it up.

I wasn't allowed to go into Ed's by myself, but I would sneak in anyway and browse the candy. He would be in the back at the meat counter and hear the jingle of the bell he had on the top of the door. Ed would look up see the door open then close but didn't see anyone. Ed knew! I can imagine him cursing under his breath. "It's that damn runt kid, Bobby." He would come around the counter just in time to catch me in the candy isle with my hand in the M & M box. Ed's first reaction was to boot me out of the store but he sometimes had patience- when I had a nickel to pay for the candy. When the transaction was complete Ed would forcefully guide me to the door.

There was another candy I was fond of, peanut butter cups, there was a Company that makes candy, Boyer, which made Mallo Cups they put a cardboard square in the package to keep its shape. The card had an amount of money on it usually from a penny to a half dollar. They had marshmallow Mallo Cups and peanut butter Mallo Cups. My brother Mike liked marshmallow I liked Peanut butter. If you bought your Mallo Cup from Ed and won a monetary prize he would cash it in. He hated to cash in the fifty cent prize. I guess as a neighborhood grocer he was barely making a living. In fact several years later his store closed and a plumbing company moved in.

Mom was especially tolerant of my misdeeds. My theory today, looking back, is she already experienced everything imaginable from the other six kids. What could I do that could possibly surprise her? Believe me; I pulled off some pretty imaginative stunts.

Aunt Marg and my mother got even more fanatical about collecting bells. I know the concept of collecting something as mundane as bells sounds weird but they were pretty interesting. Mom's interest in bells would drive pop up the wall. He tolerated it but I know deep down inside he thought it was a waste of money. Mom and Aunt Marg would travel all over the Delaware Valley going to meetings of the Colonial Chapter of the American Bell Association. Of course I got dragged along. Remember, when I said I knew my boundaries. Well, when it came to mom's bells I didn't mess with them. I wouldn't dare break one. I valued my life.

Pop had several boxes of tools in the basement. The tools were built differently then. The wrenches were made of steel or iron and were flat with larger ends. Screwdrivers were sturdier and so were hammers, chisels, and allen wrenches. Tools were very expensive and my father's tool sets were quite extensive. It took years for him to accumulate all those tools. People were always fixing their cars in our driveway. Pop was always complaining about his tools coming up missing. He used to think people were stealing them. I used to love playing with his tools and would get yelled at when I got caught. If pop's tools were disappearing, where were they going?

Let me tell you what I was doing. The alleyway between the Highland Hall Apartments and the Firehouse had these grates in the ground. They covered the holes in the ground where the basement windows of the apartment building were. I used to drop pop's tools between the spaces in the grate. The maintenance man of the apartment

building caught on and he would encourage me to fetch more tools and throw them down the grates, he would open the basement window and retrieve them. Pop's tool collection shrank as the maintenance man's got bigger.

One of the firemen caught on and told my father. I was caught, but the maintenance man denied he was encouraging me to do it. He also lied about having pop's tools. Man! Pop hated that guy and so did I. I had a different reason- Bobby couldn't sit down for a while. I never heard the end of that one, even to this day my sisters remind me of it. No wonder I never was a good mechanic. I grew up with an aversion to tools.

Chapter Fourteen Winter Fun

The weather in Philadelphia is usually most agreeable and you get to experience the full effect of all four seasons. My favorite time was the winter when lots of snow covered the ground in white. I remember after a good snow storm, Brad, Mike, and I would walk to the Philadelphia Electric Golf course on City Line and Lynn Boulevard dragging our flexible flyer sleds.. The rubber boots I had were too big so they fit over my shoes. They were black and had metal buckles. I had on long John's and a pair of blue jeans held up by suspenders. You had to wear a heavy coat in the winter. I always had ample winter clothes. I was forced by my mom to wear a hat. I had this Army green thick wool hat with ear flaps and a chin strap. Everything I had on was nearly a size too big. I must have been a sight for sore eyes. I didn't know the difference because I was excited at the prospect of going sledding with my big brothers.

I looked up to Brad because he always looked out for you. Brad didn't take any crap off other kids and wasn't afraid to fight. He would stand up to a bully. Knowing I had a big brother like Brad gave me a feeling of security. It was a good feeling inside,

knowing you weren't going to get picked on by some older kid because you were with your older brother. He also taught me the importance of standing up for myself and not letting someone pick on me. Although that lesson didn't catch on until I got to High School, after I grew a little.

There was a pretty good sized hill on the snow covered golf course. There were quite a few pine trees and the landscape made you feel like you were out in the country. There were plenty of signs warning trespassers they would be arrested if they set foot on the property. The only time the threat was not enforced was when there was snow covering the golf course. We walked down the hill of Lynn Boulevard toward the end of the fence. The three of us were trudging toward the hill in the half foot deep snow. Brad and Mike were pulling the Flexible Flyer sleds. They towed them with ropes tied to the wooden steering bar. I was always more than just a few steps behind yelling, "wait up." The closer we got to the top of the hill the more excited I got. I bet I'd fell down in the snow a half dozen times going up that hill.

I was too scared to sled down the hill by myself. Brad sat on the sled his feet keeping it in place. He put me on the front snug against his lap and held by his knees. He would push off. His feet were on the steering bar and we'd start down the hill. It was a thrill ride for me. The sled was bouncing with snow flying in my face and I was screaming all the way down the hill. About three quarters of the way down there was a bump and the sled would go airborne. When Brad steered the sled through the snow covered sand trap we would both go flying off the sled, rolling in the snow; I was covered from head to toe in snow.

There were several ways you could ride a sled. You could sit on it steering with your feet, lay down on it and steer with your hands, or some brave soles would stand on it using the rope, like reigns on a horse, to steer it. There were some unusual rides though. The kids that didn't have sleds used cardboard boxes or anything else they could find to slide down the hill.

After an hour or so of fun on the hill the environment would get to you. Snow would get in your boots and your feet would get wet and cold. The gloves on your hands got cold. Mike and I would engage in horseplay and roll around in the snow with me getting my face rubbed in it. The air was cold and I'd start to get real cranky. The day would end with me complaining of being cold. We'd walk home, Brad and Mike pulling the sleds and me tagging behind whining about my hands and feet being freezing cold.

Mom knew the drill. Her little bobby was home looking as if he just came in from an arctic expedition. She would have to help me get all the layers of clothing off, most covered in ice and snow. They were hung up in the mud room by the kitchen. My fingers and toes were numb from the cold and as the circulation started to return the tingling felt like pins and needles. The recovery was quite miserable sometimes.

My mom or older sisters used to make hot tea and put on some Lipton's Chicken noodle soup from the box. Brad, Mike and I would sit at the table and drink tea and eat the soup with crackers and bread. The meal doesn't seem like much but it really hit the spot.

Even though I came home numb from cold, wet and miserable it didn't stop me from wanting to go sledding again the next day. Brad and his friends used to go out at night and meet their friends. Once late at night some of the older teenagers snuck onto the

Atlantic gas station on West Chester Pike and found a suitable car in the parking lot. Under the cover of darkness they stole the front hood off the car dragging it to the snow covered golf course. After several attempts they tossed it over the fence. The guys would invite their girl friends and they would light a bon fire. There was plenty of beer and the boys were having a good time. The guys would pile onto the car hood aim it down the hill and the fun would start. That is until one of them fell out and got run over. Eventually one of the neighbors would get tired of the noise and call the police. All the cops had to do was show up in those days and everyone would run. There were no disrespectful verbal exchanges with the police. If the police told you to do something, you did it!

In retrospect, I think this was a rite of winter passage; because every year I went sledding there was always a car hood on the hill, the remnants of a bon fire and empty beer cans left behind.

The houses in the neighborhood were built in the late forties and fifties. They were well constructed of stone, brick or plaster and were not well insulated. The oil fueled radiator heating system kept the house warm in winter if you kept the radiators maintained by keeping the water circulating and air from accumulating in them. The houses were drafty so my mother made curtains to cover the windows. The house also had a wood burning fire place in the living room.

During very cold winter nights when the fireplace was going the living room was a very entertaining social area. We had so much fun sitting in the living room with everyone gathered around. Television was not the main attraction. Family conversation and fun, gentle, joking, and ribbing were the norm.

There were many nights after dinner where everyone would gather around the living room fireplace, jousting for a place to sit. The memories I have are absolutely heartwarming.

At night you always needed quilts and blankets to keep warm. My favorite blanket was one of the older government issued Army blankets. It was olive drab green, made from heavy wool, and had the black US stamped on it.

Most blankets when they lost their utility became rags or something to lay on when you work on the car. I remember when my mother threw my blanket away. It had holes in it and was covered in grease and oil.

When my father lost his job at Sealtest Dairy in the early sixties he went to work for the Yellow Cab Company. There was a satellite garage outside of Upper Darby where my dad picked up his cab. The pay was lousy but he was a professional driver and courteous so he made good tips.

Money was tight for a while and I would like to relate a couple of winter coping with cold weather memories. It was cold down in the teens. It was a bitter cold Philadelphia winter.

If we wanted the house to stay warm in the winter you had to make sure the tank in the basement had oil in it. There was this one time either my father forgot to check the oil level or my parents didn't have the money to pay the bill. Actually it doesn't matter, because for whatever the reason we did run out of oil. It was freezing cold and the heater stopped working. It didn't take long for that drafty old house to get cold.

Pop was always the worrier and went into the panic mode. He would over react and immediately started calling his brothers looking for help and advice. When pop did panic he also had a tendency to drink more beer.

My mother on the other hand was well prepared for any crisis. She remained calm and wouldn't panic. She would tell us to bundle up and get ready for a cold night. She would try and come up with a common sense solution to the crisis. Yes we had a very cold night but we all survived it.

When I say mom remained calm I'm referring to dealing with a family crisis. Now when she finally flew off the handle, she started in on pop because he let the oil run out. Mom would pick up the handle and chase pop with it.

The next day was a Sunday and the oil companies didn't deliver on Sunday. As luck would have it, Uncle Harvey came to the rescue. He had a friend who delivered a cord of wood for the fireplace. That was nice of his friend.

All the kids were outside unloading the wood and neatly stacking it against the garage. Pop and Uncle Harvey were able to get the fireplace going. Aside from the arguing on the best way to stack the wood, where to put the newspaper and kindling wood, and the bickering brothers do; they were able to get the fire going. It wasn't long before the fire warmed the living room and some of the rest of the house. The chimneys were made of stone and brick and went through the upper floors of the house. The rooms adjoining the chimney benefited from the fireplace as the heat from the vented smoke heated the rooms. The upstairs rooms on either side of the chimney would be slightly heated also.

On Sunday morning the fire was blazing and we were bringing in logs. I grabbed a log off the stack and brought it in the house. Mom was in the kitchen cooking up our usual Sunday dinner of boiled ham, potatoes, and cabbage. Mom made the usual topping for the potatoes by making stewed tomatoes. Everybody else was going about their business. My sisters were upstairs changing from their church clothes. Mike was in his room. Pop was drinking a beer and watching golf on television. Uncle Harvey was over for dinner sneaking shots of VO. I was actually too young to be putting logs on the fire but everybody was preoccupied. The fire was burning pretty good when I took the special log I brought in, and put it on the fire.

Within seconds of putting that log on the fireplace millions of winged insects, I don't know if they were flying ants or termites came swarming out of that log flying or crawling across the living room. I started screaming and everybody was scrambling looking for whatever they could find to kill the bugs. The living room was pandemonium. We were running around stomping bugs, swatting bugs, chasing them across the walls, and across the ceiling. It must have been a couple hours before we killed all the bugs. It wasn't long before the house was back to normal.

Chapter Fifteen Seasons

I look back when I was a kid and try to think of when the times were the hardest. The poorest times for us were not all that bad. I never once thought I was poor growing up. My parents always had food on the table and we always had shoes on our feet; even if you had to cover the occasional hole in the sole with cardboard. I always had a coat in the winter and warm clothes. It didn't bother me that they were hand me downs. Don't get

me wrong. You wouldn't catch me dead wearing my sister's clothes. I didn't even want to be seen with a girls scarf on.

My brother and I were talking and reminiscing when he asked me if I remembered the time when mom and pop were broke and we didn't have any money to buy food for dinner. We all scraped together change. We chipped in our pennies, nickels, and dimes and dumped them on the table. We got together a couple dollars and we went out and bought some jars of Ravioli and bread we thought that was a gourmet meal. With that meal we had enough to eat. Our family was truly blessed!

Many people across America and the rest of the world were starving. Thinking back we were actually fairly well off. Considering! Sometimes I can relate to the sisters of St. Laurence School walking around the lunch tables striking out at the kids that wouldn't eat their lunch and were wasting food, Those sisters would yell; "there's pagan babies all over the world that are starving, you better eat that food." Like me having food will help people half way across the world. I guess there was a demented logic to it.

I will say this- I thank my parents for what they gave me and I make it a point to thank God for them even in their passing. The toughest times for me today are holidays.

Eventually you got tired of winter. The snow looked great the first couple of days but when it started to melt it turned to a grey, mushy, slush that made walking a slippery adventure. One misstep in slush and you would fall on your keester and get soaking wet. I can remember many occasions I'd go outside with the intent of walking across the firehouse parking lot to go buy some candy at the drug store; as soon as I got out the door, down the steps and onto the sidewalk, I'd step ankle high into freezing cold, icy slush, the water rushing over the top of my rubber boots soaking my shoes, socks and

feet. Within a minute your feet were freezing cold and back into the house I'd run. This boy's winter quest for some M & M's was over.

The undressing ritual would start all over. First, the hat would come off, then the gloves, boots, wet shoes, coat, sweater, and finally the long underwear. The clothes would be thrown on whatever piece of furniture was closest. I could never get the boots off by myself. These boots were made of heavy Vulcan rubber. They had these metal buckles you had to snap and of course un-snap. I'd always have to get help. I can tell you, on more than one occasion, one of my sisters was holding me by the arms as another one was pulling the boots off my feet. I was like a rope in a tug of war until the boot came off, and we went tumbling backward onto the living room floor. The sister on the pulling end got a face full of water as the boot came off and the slush inside sprayed all over. Everyone would start laughing at the spectacle. The craving for sugar would have to wait until my shoes dried off.

I want to jump ahead a few years. I often had to wear hand me down tennis shoes or wear the cheap low top little boy tennis shoes called Keds. What I wanted was my first pair of brand new Converse Chuck Taylor High Tops. We called them chuckies. They came in Black or White. I'll never forget the winter of 1966/1967. It snowed all the time we had blizzard after blizzard. Mike and I after a snow storm would grab the snow shovels and for a couple bucks shovel sidewalks and dig out cars. We made about twenty five bucks each and I finally had enough money to buy some tennis shoes. I walked the mile or so from the Pike Down Cedar Lane to Lansdowne Ave. to a sporting goods store across the street from Bonds Shopping Center. They were closed because of the snow. I

eventually made it there when they were open and bought my first brand new chuckies with my own money. I was all of ten years old.

When spring came and the weather started warming up it was time to go exploring the neighborhood again. The trees were beginning to get their leaves, flowers were blooming, the grass was greener, and you didn't need to put on a whole wardrobe to go outside. I could also wander farther and visit friends more easily.

I had quite a few friends in the neighborhood and by coincidence many were girls as they lived closest to me. Across the street was a family that had seven kids. They had three girls and four boys. One of the girls, Joan was my age. We would eventually be classmates in elementary school.

I always had a crush on her when I was young. We were just friends though and never had any kind of close relationship. That was probably because she was smart and realized I was wild as a tornado's wind. When we were young we were good friends though, along with her brother Pat, sisters Rose and Carol. There were two other girls down Cedar that were also in our group, Mary Beth and Lisa.

I remember I was invited to Joan's birthday party at her house. It must have been her 6th or 7th birthday. It was on a weekend afternoon about two or three o'clock. I was outside in the back yard playing all morning and was filthy dirty. I saw a bunch of parents with kids in tow going to the house; so naturally, I just walked over there. I ignored my mom's earlier instructions to make sure I came in early enough to get cleaned up for the party.

Mrs. Johnson called my mother on the phone to come over and see how I was dressed. I had uncombed hair, dirty shirt, and shorts. My mother was not only

embarrassed but she was mad. I was dragged home, stripped, and tossed into the tub for the world's fastest bath. Mom dressed me in a flash and I made it to the party looking like a different kid. I made it to the party in time to enjoy a couple of games, some cake, and ice cream. Party games were so much simpler then than now. There were pin the tail on the donkey, musical chairs, and red light green light.

For some odd reason my mother reminded me of that day for years. I guess there was some significance to the story about looking nice when you go out. How many of us were told this one? Whenever you go out make sure your underwear and socks don't have holes in them. You never know when you might end up in the hospital emergency room. Really now, if your that sick or hurt and your headed to the emergency room why would I care whether I have holes in my underwear?

When it came to the neighborhood there were a lot of kids within a couple of blocks. It is amazing how some natural barriers like a busy street or long line of fences stretching across a field can steer you in one direction versus another. Madison Ave is just two short blocks from my house and that is where I met two of my life long friends, Jim Mahoney and Pete Rausch. I probably met Jim when I was around two or three while our parents talked in passing or while visiting, and I met Pete after I was in elementary school. Jim and Pete lived about a half a block apart. There were a lot of families with children on Madison Ave. Playing with my friends in that street were some of the best times in my life. I will get to some amazing stories about friendship later.

During springtime as it got warmer more of us were outside looking for something to do. Children had great imaginations and could come up with a lot of things to do. Adults were the same way and one of the favorite pastimes was the backyard bar-

b-que. I learned as I grew up and moved away that people from every region of the country have a different concept of what a bar-b-que is. So when you read what was on the menu don't laugh. Besides, it's not the food that is served that makes the event a success. It is the interaction between family and friends.

Mom and pop would invite all the relatives from Delaware to New Jersey. The fireman hanging out came over. My brothers and sisters friends would show up. My parents never turned anyone away that wanted to eat. If I were a betting man I'd bet mom bought the cheapest hamburger meat you could buy and the biggest cheapest box of franks you could get. I'll also wager that they went to the bakery and bought day old hamburger buns and hot dog rolls. My mother made the best rice and bread pudding you could ever eat. Cool-aid and iced tea were cheap and my mother would ask the guests to bring a covered dish.

I remember some of the bar-b-ques had nearly seventy-five to a hundred people at them. You talk about a lot of fun. I probably should mention that the adults could bring their own booze. In all the years though, at the bigger family events, it was unusual for anyone to get out of hand or too drunk. The family weddings were another story.

One fourth of July we had a big shindig at the house. There were family, friends, firemen from the fire house, and a lot of us kids running around. The food was fairly simple, hotdogs and hamburgers. There were potato chips and several tables full of various covered dishes brought by the guests. Mike and I were playing with firecrackers and some larger fireworks called cherry bombs. A cherry bomb was round, red, about the size of a cherry, and had the explosive effect of about five or ten fire crackers. Mike and I were lighting firecrackers, tossing them aside; we were not being dangerous, yet, and

were being fairly careful. We had a long stick mosquito repellant that resembled an incense stick. We used to call them “punks.” We were using it to light the fuses on the firecrackers. Eventually we got bored with tossing the Black Cat firecrackers around so we got this wild idea to try and blow something up.

I had this plastic pirate ship, it had tiny rubber pirates, small cannons, treasure chest, and all kinds of little accessories that would make a toy pirate ship fun to play with. It was about a foot and a half long. I was wondering what a firecracker would do to it. I lit one and threw it on the deck and it went off with a loud bang, scattering the toy pirates, but there was no real damage to the ship. I put all the little pirates, treasure chest, cannons, and all the accessories and set them up ready for combat. These scallywags were no match for Mike and I. We decided to bring out the big one. Mike took a cherry bomb, lit the fuse, and dropped it down the ship’s hold. We quickly backed up about ten feet. The fuse burned then there was a real loud Boom! The ship exploded into a million pieces sending plastic like shrapnel across the yard. It was a miracle that Mike and I didn’t get injured or blinded by the exploding vessel. Man, the yard got quiet. We were lucky we didn’t kill someone. Of course we got into trouble for almost blowing ourselves up but we survived. I was sent to my room for the remainder of the party. By the way! That pirate ship was one of my favorite toys. There were hundreds of pieces of that toy ship scattered across the yard.

In the back of the house there was this small porch with a door to the mud room of the kitchen. The porch had some rickety steps leading to the back yard. Under the porch there was dirt and enough room for a little guy like me to make into a play area. I

could stand up without hitting my head. Mike on the other hand was just tall enough to make him have to duck his head a little.

We had all kinds of small toy soldiers, jeeps, trucks, tanks, and artillery pieces. The theme of World War II was still popular and the Korean conflict was recently resolved. We used to make the dirt under the porch elaborate battle fields. Even little kids can get imaginative.

This was about the time the small miniature soldiers were popular. Mike and I had boxes of them. We wanted to make a winter scene but it was summertime. I ran to the basement and grabbed the big box of Mom's laundry detergent to use as snow. That obviously didn't go over well when mom had to do the wash. I usually lost every battle because Mike, being older, was a better strategist than I. Actually, the war was sometimes lost when Mike and I would get into an argument or fight and I'd run into the house crying. All in all we had a great time playing war games.

Chapter Sixteen School

I want to go back to when I went into first grade. All good things come to an end and a child's unfettered freedom ends with school age. I can imagine the sigh of relief my parents, sisters, shopkeepers, firemen, and neighbors had when I finally was old enough to go to school. I'm sure there were many more people in the neighborhood that also jumped for joy, but I'll leave it at that for now.

Most children went to kindergarten starting at age five. I was born in December so I was just over four and a half when my parents tried to get me into kindergarten at Highland Park Elementary school. I was too young and immature for kindergarten. I skipped kindergarten and went to first grade the following year at St. Laurence School.

That was a big mistake on my parent's part. I was pretty far behind the other kids that attended kindergarten.

As I mentioned earlier St. Laurence's was across the Pike, a half a block away from where I lived. St. Laurence was a pretty large complex consisting of an interconnected convent, school, church, and rectory. The buildings were constructed of stone with a blue gray slate roof. The church had a majestic vaulted ceiling and another church in the basement. The windows were beautiful stained glass. The church had a main altar and two altars on either side adorned by artistic statues of Mary and Joseph. There was a balcony with an organ and choir loft. The basement also had a separate church as equally artistically decorated.

It was September of 1962, I was just over five and a half years old, when I was dragged kicking and screaming into St Laurence School. The teaching staff of St. Laurence's was mostly Catholic Sisters. I don't remember the order but I can tell you how they were dressed. They had dark blue habits covering their hair with a white scarf and a large white cardboard half circle breast plate. The sisters wore white stiff collars and a large pair of rosary beads around the waist. The shoes they wore were half boots that laced up. I got to know the toe of those shoes well over the next eight years. I really cannot believe the sisters tolerated their religious garb in the September heat without air conditioning. The habit the sisters wore determined the order they belonged to. As much as I'd like to joke about them here, I won't, out of the deep respect for them. Or maybe it was the fear they programmed in me at an early age. All right! I'm being too nice. The derogatory term for a sister was nun or penguin. They didn't program fear into me they beat it into me.

My earliest recollection of school was borderline traumatic. Since we lived only a block away my mother walked me to school. I was marched through the door and compellingly placed in line with boys on one side of the hall and girls on the other. I peered over my shoulder as my mother quickly walked away. The girls wore maroon uniform dresses with white blouses. The boys all wore dress slacks, white long sleeve dress shirts, a maroon clip on tie with SLS embroidered on it. I had the advantage of an older brother having gone through the routine so I was properly dressed and coached on proper first day of school behavior. Mike told me in no uncertain terms, “don’t be a cry baby.” I’m sure I did anyway. Mom knew how we had to be dressed and on the walk to school warned me how to behave. I was standing in line between two other boys both at least a head taller than me. Eventually, we were paraded to a classroom and seated.

I think there were about fifty or sixty kids in a class room. There were twenty five or thirty boys and twenty five or thirty girls. A reality check would say there were more like forty or fifty but I cannot find my first grade picture to give an accurate count. You can bet your bottom dollar no matter how many children were in the classroom the sister had complete control of the situation.

Let’s make a brief comparison. Can you imagine a teacher, in this day and age, walking into a classroom on the first day of school and having more than twenty five students in their classroom? They would be filing a grievance with the union and threaten to walkout. That teacher would want hazardous duty pay and at least an hour of overtime a day for good measure. Ah! I really don’t want to get today’s teachers mad because they are under paid, under appreciated, and maligned when the educational system fails a

child. But the truth of the matter is- it was pretty darn rough on the sisters back in the sixties. Besides, they never had little bobby in their classroom.

As I said earlier, I don't remember their religious order, but when it came to teaching a bunch of first graders it had to be an order of patience. I was a very smart kid so for the sake of fairness remember I didn't have the advantage of kindergarten. I was already a year behind the learning curve of the other kids in my class; I was also the smallest kid in the classroom.

The sisters were affectionately (yeah right) referred to as nuns. I think it is a derogatory term with its roots being from the older boys as they referred to the convent as a nunnery. That was what everybody called the sisters.

At St. Laurence we had the finest school book ever printed in the *First Grade Reader*. Remember- "See Spot Run..." We also had the latest technology in spelling, a small box of yellow, square, thin, cardboard letters and punctuation marks. We were required to put them in order and stack them neatly in the box so you could quickly spell words by laying them out on the desk. You were not allowed to take them home and when you handled the box you treated it like a carton of eggs lest you shake it up and scramble the letters inside of the box. There was a box of numbers too, I think they were a different color and the rules for handling them were the same.

Another useful educational tool we had was a catechism book with prayers we had to memorize. The catechism followed you from grade to grade. The prayers and questions and answers you memorized and recited back like a parrot were progressively longer and harder to remember as you progressed in school. The very first question in the book was "Who made the world?" The answer, "God made the world."

All of our writing assignments would be in black, bound, composition books and were written in pencil. I remember my very first writing assignment was making ovals.

I know, depending on your school experience, I'm either bringing back fond memories or triggering post traumatic stress disorder. Don't worry, you can handle it. Don't get me wrong, it was not only traumatic for me, it was a valuable learning experience. Looking back I can say it wasn't always fun but, I can honestly say I wouldn't trade a single day.

Do you remember your first disciplinary experience in school? I can tell you that the sisters at St. Laurence didn't spare the rod or spoil the child. My first grade teacher had a long, thin pointer; the sisters didn't hit us in the early years, but they would slam it on your desk with a loud crack resonating throughout the classroom. It would scare the daylights, not only out of the offending child, it scared the whole class. In first grade the corporal punishment was usually grabbing you by the arms and being shaken for minor offenses, yardstick across the butt for more serious infractions, or being grabbed by the ear with a little twisting while being dragged to Mother Superiors office for the most grievous acts. The latter punishment was called "boxing your ears." Sisters were very effective disciplinarians; however the threat of being taken to Mother Superiors office was enough to keep even the wildest, tempestuous child in check. Even I didn't want to cross that line.

For some reason having good handwriting in Catholic elementary school was almost a pass to heaven. We were taught how to write cursive writing from day one. If the sisters caught you printing they called you a pagan boy and compared you to the evil children who went to the public school on the other side of the fence from St. Laurence.

For some reason the sisters had this demented opinion of the public school, Highland Park Elementary School.

The nun's had this ridiculous notion that all the non-catholic public school kids were all going to hell. They used to say all the public school kids did was play and have recess. Highland Park was next to St. Laurence's in location but not in stature.

With handwriting being so important how did I measure up? I'll bet there wasn't a single person in the entire St. Laurence Elementary School that had worse handwriting than I. Being primarily right handed with the curse of writing and eating with the left hand didn't help me in school. As I mentioned the first writing exercises in class we had to take a pencil and make ovals. The idea was to make neat, concentric, uniform ovals on these pages in the composition book lined specifically for that purpose. For someone writing right handed the motion was natural and probably easy. I had to listen to the instructions and reverse them and try and make these neat ovals while pushing the pencil rather than pulling the pencil along the page of the book. Remember, the book was bound and you couldn't neatly tear out the pages so sloppy work was permanent.

If you are right handed, I challenge you to take a pencil in your left hand and make neat concentric ovals on a lined sheet of paper. Good luck! Obviously I didn't make a good impression on my first grade teacher. I think I had my knuckles busted daily by a ruler because this nun had the demented notion that the left hand was the hand of the devil. I never once tried to change writing hands or surrender to the concept that I better learn to write right handed or I was going to hell. I think I was the only student where the sister tore out a page from the bound composition book and threw it away. Oh well! In my eight years of elementary school none of the sisters ever got used to me writing badly.

The punishment was constant exclusion and ostracism during any and all writing exercises. I don't know how many of the sisters at St. Laurence said the same thing to me over and over. "Robert you will learn to write with your right hand because the left hand is the hand of the devil" I think that is worth repeating.

I'll never forget when international pen pals were the latest fad. I'll never forget those crazy sisters wouldn't let me have a pen pal because my handwriting was so bad. Then I was so mad I wrote the French Embassy and got my own pen pal. I think I wrote about five times to this French kid before I lost interest. Besides, I couldn't read his writing.

Here is a note to all parents everywhere. This is the computer age where children will probably be banging away on a keyboard before they begin to write. Teach your children how to write. Spend time with them making sure they have good penmanship. In first grade your children will not get an award for killing zombies on a video game or learning how to text message with one finger. Handwriting is the basic form of communication; with technology advancing as fast as it has handwriting may become a lost art. Every time I pick up a pen and start to write I wish I had better handwriting. At least the children of the twenty first century will have an excuse. Texting!

I can envision it now. Some sister from an Eastern European convent tucked away in the mountains comes to America to teach first grade at St. Laurence School. Twenty children in her classroom will not know how to make a concentric oval or write the alphabet. However, they will be able to text message each other on their cell phones, play a video game, and watch a movie all at the same time.

The nuns had a business on the side; they sold soft pretzels at recess in the morning and candy during recess in the afternoon. The candy room at the school could rival that of any drug store or five and dime. The reality of it was the sisters guarded the candy in the St. Laurence candy room like the government guarded the gold at Fort Knox. The candy room was in a hallway between the school and the convent. There was a large wooden varnished door with brass hinges and a large lock securing the door. Rarely were you allowed to enter the candy room unless you were one of the sisters favorites and you helped carry the candy to the class rooms for sale at recess.

I felt like I was discriminated against because they didn't have my favorite candy- *the one that melts in your mouth and not in your hands*- a concept that you would think would be handy for an elementary school class. One thing about sisters, they could get any spare change you had left in your pocket after lunch by compelling you into buying some candy during recess. The only thing that bothered me about being Catholic was not being allowed to eat meat on Fridays. We always had fish from the fish market on Garret Rd. I only liked Fish Sticks and even then suffered through them.

Easter time was not only the most revered of all catholic holy days as it meant the suffering of Jesus Christ and the crucifixion; but it also meant the resurrection of Christ and the forgiveness of our sins. However for the children it usually meant the sacrifice and penance of Lent as a sacrifice you gave up something you liked until after Easter Sunday. One Easter season for Lent I gave up candy. Except of course for M & M's, that was not possible. I cheated and ate them in secret whenever I could.

Easter was a sales boom for the sisters' candy business. It meant the annual Easter candy fundraiser. Every student at St. Laurence had an order form to take home. You

were supposed to go door to door and sell Easter candy. There were chocolate covered peanut butter eggs, colored marshmallow bunnies, large, and small chocolate bunnies. The large hollow chocolate eggs you filled with candy were the most popular item. Then there were my favorite Easter candy. The small chocolate covered coconut Easter eggs. Man! They were good. My parents always ordered one box of candy from me and one from Mike. Even though they couldn't afford it, my parents always had an Easter basket set out on the table on Easter Sunday for each one of the kids.

Let me relate this experience. It was a really hot afternoon and a sister was going up and down the isle selling these chocolates with a cherry filling. They were unwrapped and she was selling them individually for a penny. I hated this particular kind of candy and I was required to buy one. Sister almost forced me to eat it right there. Knowing I might not be able to get some water to wash it down, I palmed it, and slipped it into my back pocket. I was wearing a new pair of slacks my mother recently bought. I sat down with the cherry filled chocolate candy deep in my back pocket and it squished. The kids were laughing at me because it looked like I crapped in my trousers. The sister started yelling at me for putting the candy in my pocket. The worst part of the experience was spending the rest of the day walking around with melted cherry chocolate that was all sticky and mushy in my back pocket. For once in my young life I wish I didn't have a penny at recess.

When I got home my mother reacted to the mess not the circumstance. She didn't hear, nor did she let me explain, how I got this mess of chocolate and cherry in the pocket of my new pants. I never have eaten a chocolate covered cherry candy of any sort since then.

Chapter Seventeen Friendship

Jim Mahoney was in first grade with me at St. Laurence but missed a significant amount of time because of a kidney disease that nearly killed him. For quite some time he was bedridden and I often would go visit him and drop off lessons. Jim's mother was my second mother growing up. If my mother missed teaching me a lesson about character building while I was growing up, Mrs. Mahoney made up for it. She stepped right in and corrected me. I once learned a valuable lesson from her and it is well worth relating.

This story has to do with a mother's love for her child and a pharmacist that missed a valuable lesson in customer service. The owner of the Highland Park Apothecary was a pharmacist who I will not name. Even at six years old I knew the Pharmacist well, I liked the guy. In the four previous years I spent a significant amount of money buying M & M's, other candy and other stuff from him. Mrs. Mahoney told me this story about the pharmacist many times over the years.

Jim was a very sick child. His mother was worried. If I remember this correctly they moved a bed into the living room for Jim. Mrs. Mahoney's care for Jim proved a mother's love for a child is the greatest bond in the universe. When Jim's illness took a turn for the worse he developed a dangerously high fever. Mrs. Mahoney summoned a doctor to her house. In those days doctors made house calls. The apprehension of waiting for the doctor to arrive as a mother tends to a suffering child is indescribable. The doctor arrived, examined her child and gave her a prescription telling her to start the medication right away. Mrs. Mahoney did not drive so she ran two blocks to the drug store to get the prescription filled. While at the Highland Park Apothecary Mrs. Mahoney was frantic trying to get the pharmacist's attention to get the prescription filled. He told her she

would have to wait her turn in line because he had other prescriptions before hers that needed to be filled. She explained to him her dire circumstance and his attitude was very aloof and he appeared uncaring. Mrs. Mahoney left in frustration running to another pharmacy, obtaining the lifesaving medicine and running home.

I know for a fact that she never set foot in that store again and she took her business elsewhere. Mrs. Mahoney related this story to many of the neighbors for years after and I'm sure Highland Park Apothecary lost a lot of business because of it. In his defense, I'm sure he didn't intentionally disregard the circumstance and was a very caring man. But I think he jeopardized his reputation in the neighborhood by not taking the time to fill the prescription.

There is a lesson to be learned from this. If you are in the customer service industry and someone is trying to get your attention you should always take the time to read the body language and facial expressions of the customer in addition to listening to the story. You might have to accommodate a late comer over a customer that is waiting. A little triage or prioritization in customer service can go a long way to making you successful. If you are working in customer service and your position requires it, learn to multitask, do several things at once, and take an interest in every customer you wait on. Treat every person you wait on as if they were your best customer. You'll be rewarded for it.

Jim eventually got well and returned to school; being smarter than most he caught right back up as if he didn't miss a day in class. I, on the other hand, was always catching up. It seemed that I just didn't grasp it the first time around. There was something about

processing information I was missing. I was very intelligent but first grade was hard. The grades on my report card showed it.

Do you remember how report cards were formatted? I swear the sisters thought the report card itself was as important as the declaration of independence. It was printed on card stock and was elaborately written out in fancy handwriting by a cartridge pen. The report card was placed in an envelope and sent home with the student. We got report cards four times a school year. I think the school always timed the end of a report period and taking home the report card with the day before a vacation or a long weekend. I swear I missed a lot of recreation on long weekends because I was grounded and had to stay inside because of bad grades. That was the routine for me in school. I didn't get bad grades because of a lack of trying; it was for a deficiency I had processing information.

The report card was reviewed by your parents, signed, and returned on a specific day. When you returned the report card to school it had to be in the same condition as when you took it home. The envelope sister put the card in was like gold. Oh my Gosh! It better not have any stains, it better not be bent, folded, or mutilated! Think about it for a second. We're talking about little Bobby. Do you really think the report card went back in the same pristine condition it came home in? Not a chance! After it got passed around at the holiday dinner and all my family and relatives saw what a stellar student I wasn't there was at least some gravy, cranberry sauce, or a little mashed potatoes on the envelope.

Needless to say the sister had some choice words for my report card envelope on Monday. I think my grade for neatness on the next report card was already decided based on the condition I returned the previous report card envelop in. I'll bet Jim's still has his

first grade report card and the envelop 48 years later; and it is in better condition than the one I returned after only three days in my possession.

That brings up another discussion. Since I had so much trouble in school Would I have been diagnosed with attention Deficit Disorder with Hyperactivity or ADDHD and given Ritalin, Aderol, Amphetamines, or some other drug to make me a better student? Probably yes and wrongfully yes! By the way, in 2010 I graduated magna cum laude with a 3.83 GPA from Texas A & M University in Corpus Christi with a Bachelors Degree in Criminal Justice. It took about eight years taking six hours a semester.

Let's take a brief look at what parents are subjecting their children to. The drug companies have successfully marketed drugs for ADDHD and ADD to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars a year in sales. Teachers, counselors, and school administrators have to deal with problem children. These drugs do work and can make energetic children less energetic, more obedient, and less of a problem. Naturally, I am oversimplifying the issue. These medications have legitimate purposes but are we overusing them? There are thousands of children that need them. But! I decry the circumstance where there is a line outside of the nurse's office of schools throughout the country dispensing these medications to normal children that don't need to be exposed to their side effects. These drugs can have long lasting harmful consequences on your child.

If you have a child that is displaying evidence of ADDHD you need to take your child not only to a pediatrician, please, take them to a professional licensed child psychiatrist with training and experience in medications that affect the brain chemistry. Pediatricians and family doctors shouldn't be prescribing these drugs to children unless there are certain other medical tests performed that would indicate these drugs are a last

resort. No parent should have a child treated with drugs for ADDHD until they have exhausted all means of counseling, coaching, and behavior modification programs available. Basically, what I am implying is, use the drugs as a last resort! I thank God they didn't have these drugs back then because I have no doubt they would have been prescribed for me.

I successfully completed first grade and brought my grades up to an acceptable level. I really have to thank my older brother Mike for helping me. I clearly remember him helping me with my homework and explaining the other subjects. I'm sure I was a pain in the butt and he was a patient tutor.

At St. Laurence we also had religious training. Some people would call Catholic training in the sixties indoctrination. I was too stubborn to indoctrinate and I questioned everything. I am a strong believer in the Catholic Church and their teachings but I also believe in a forgiving God and that he will reward anyone with eternal salvation that embraces his word. No matter what the denomination or religion. I question if I'm being politically correct to get people to read this or am I really a tolerant fellow.

We had to go to mass at 9:00 A.M. every Sunday. You had to sit with your class and the seating was arranged by grade. We all referred to Sunday mass as nine o'clock mass. It was mandatory. You also had to bring your pre-printed collection envelope whether or not you had any money in it to contribute. My parents gave what they could to the church, but with seven kids to feed and clothe every nickel counted. Going back to the envelopes, considering that there were six catholic children with envelopes if we were lucky a quarter was the best my mom could do. I think they used to use the envelopes to take attendance. Once I went to Nine o'clock mass and didn't have any money in the

envelope. I tossed it out, being too embarrassed to turn it in empty. I did my best to participate. I sang all the hymns, recited all the prayers and tried to do my best not to get caught talking. When the ushers were going down the aisles with the collection basket the sisters were watching with glaring eyes. I pretended to put the envelope in the maroon velvet lined wicker basket. I got caught. Punishment came later. It was the first time I got detention in a class room on a Sunday.

Nine o'clock mass wasn't fun. It was a chore that interfered with weekend plans during the school year. If you missed the sisters were punitive. The mass included loudly proclaiming your responses during prayer and singing hymns. Sister made sure both were performed. I never understood the religious symbolism of a sister hiding a ruler up the sleeve of her habit to make sure you sang and prayed aloud. Of course being the shortest kid in the class I was always on the end of the pew closest to the isle where sister stood. To this day I have an aversion to singing. However, I didn't get this far in life without a daily prayer routine. If you missed the nine o'clock mass you had to bring a note from you parents why you were absent. Well on this particular Monday I went to school thinking I was in good standing with the sister. I had all my homework done. I was on time, dressed in dress slacks and a neatly pressed white shirt with a clip on tie. I thought I was perfect. Well as the chips may fall; I was singled out for missing nine o'clock mass. Oh well!

As we got older and progressed in grades; many times during elementary school we would take advantage of lunch time and sneak over to Philadelphia Electric Golf Course or Cobbs Creek Golf Course and wade in the creek. You should have seen the look on the sisters faces when several students would come in from lunch with their pants

all wet. Jim, a couple other kids, and I would generally get into trouble for wandering in a few minutes late.

The church used to print a bulletin with the contributors names and the amounts they contributed on the back. I will add this very important editorial. If it weren't for the parishioners who contributed sizeable sums of money to St. Laurence during the fifties, sixties and through the present it wouldn't have been possible for my brother Mike and I along with my other siblings to get such a quality education- for free. I realize the "free" education is gone now but it was free back then, when you didn't have a lot of money.

On more than one occasion I was kept after school for getting into mischief. In fact in one year of elementary school this one sister that didn't care much for me. It was so bad for me when I was in fifth grade that I nearly failed the year. This one cantankerous, torturous nun, Sister Agnes Loretta used to punish me by making me sit on the isle by the window with the sun beating down on my desk. If the windows were open the one next to my desk were closed. This nun wouldn't let me put the books into the desk and I had to put them on the seat next to me. There wasn't enough room for both the stack of books and me so on several occasions I would knock them onto the floor. The noise distracted the whole class. Sister would run across the room with a yard stick and start whacking away at me. The funny thing was she would punish me for bad handwriting, low scores on a test, writing left handed, and any number of infractions. That was my most miserable year of school in my life. If someone was caught picking on me I got wacked, not the offender.

As you advanced through the school years you went from writing with pencils to writing with pens. Now we weren't allowed to use any pen other than a cartridge pen. If

you know anything about pens with a quill they were designed for right handed writers that pull the pen gently across the paper in a smooth, sweeping, oval motion.

I'm a lefty and we tend to push the pen across the paper. Cartridge pens do not write particularly well for lefties. I can attest to this. I ruined more pens, spilled more ink, and ruined a lot of white shirts because of those darn cartridge pens. I hated them! Today I wouldn't own a cartridge pen if it were made of solid gold, priceless, and you gave it to me.

I don't know how many times I got smacked around by a religious zealot dressed in a black and blue habit because there was this ugly ink blot on my paper.

I was the smallest kid in my class all the way up to the seventh grade. I got picked on quite a bit by the bigger kids. I was picked on all the way through sixth grade. I had this growth spurt that summer and kind of caught up to the rest of the class, even though I was still smaller than most of the kids my age.

Let me jump ahead a few years. I made a decision in seventh grade that I wasn't going to be picked on or bullied anymore. There was this kid named Tommy. He liked to pick on me and I fought back. He challenged me to a fight after school. I followed a whole group of kids to a vacant field across the street from the school. As we were walking he turned around and jumped on me. I fought back and we wrestled to the ground. We were swinging wildly at each other, rolling on the ground and grappling when I got the upper hand and got on top of him. Well, something snapped and I took my fists and I furiously without mercy or even thought pummeled his face, nose, and eyes. One of the bigger kids realized the damage I was doing and pulled me off of him. I was quite emotional. I looked down and saw a lot of blood from his nose. I got scared, and ran

home crying afraid that I really hurt him. What was my biggest fear? Was I afraid of fighting back? Not really, I just didn't like to hurt people. I was scared, yes, but the truth is I never wanted to hurt anyone.

It was a Friday and later that night my parents got a phone call from Tommy's mother. Fortunately, they thought she was over reacting to the nature injuries I was accused of causing. I was in trouble for getting into a fight. I was grounded for Saturday, allowed to play on Sunday and forgot about the fight. Until Monday!

Monday rolled around and I went to school. The entire class was quiet. Nobody would talk to me and I noticed Tommy was absent from school.

Two days later Tommy showed up for class with two of the bigger kids. He had two black eyes, a broken nose, and swollen cheek. The sister took all of about three seconds to figure out that I was the one who beat him up.

It's amazing that this sister ignored all the times I got picked on, pushed around, punched and beat up. The one time I fought back- I was the bully. What's funny was, I got detention and had to stay after school for a whole week. I also wasn't allowed to participate in recess. That was a blessing in disguise.

Tommy's two friends were waiting every day after school for a week to ambush me and get even. I wasn't an easy target being under the supervision of detention. Finally, one of them, this kid nicknamed Tucker, cornered me and told me he wanted to fight me. Only his language was a little more obscene and frightening. Unfortunately, for me being in seventh grade with Tucker, who happened to be tougher than most of the eight graders, I didn't stand a chance. Funny thing was all I had to tell him was, "I never wanted to fight Tommy, in the first place. He was picking on me, pushing me around, and calling me a

pussy, for being afraid to fight him. I just want you guys to leave me alone. If I have to fight you and get beat up to be left alone I guess I will.” Tucker, for some unknown reason, left me alone. That was the last time I ever got picked on at St. Laurence. Most of those guys became my good friends for the remaining years in school and to this day I keep in touch with some of them. That is- the ones that are not deceased! Looking forty eight years into the future, of the thirty boys who I went to first grade with there are about fifteen that are deceased. I guess the seventies and drugs took its toll.

The one thing I hated was in May every student had to dress up, march around the parking lot of the school in honor of Mary, Jesus’ mother. It was called the May Procession. For eight years I marched in that stupid procession. I never got hoe practicing for weeks ahead of time just to march around the school parking lot for a religious ceremony was going to help.

Chapter Eighteen Summer

During my early years at St. Laurence I think I thanked God for summer more than I thanked him for anything else. Summertime after a school year was fantastic. During the school year my movement was often limited due to a lack of exemplary performance in class. Call it what you’d like- restriction, grounded, or, as mother used to say “you aren’t going anywhere buster.” I loved the summer vacation. It meant freedom.

As I got older I wandered farther. During the summer we spent a lot of time playing games with the other kids in the neighborhood. For me it was mostly on Madison Ave. just a couple blocks away. That was where I spent many a day. The games we played were outdoors and involved all the imagination children could conjure.

Jim Mahoney lived on Madison toward the end of the next to the last block. My other good friend was Pete Rausch. He lived in the middle of the block. I want to spend a few moments talking about Pete Rausch.

When I met Pete Rausch we were quite young. Pete wore two hearing aids and was probably about 90 to 95 percent hearing impaired. Pete had two older sisters, Susan and Carole, an older brother Ted, and a younger sister Gail. His father, Ted senior, was a robust, balding man who worked as a union painter for Boeing in Philadelphia. I can't remember his mother's first name. Mr. Rausch was a proud man of German descent and was a hard worker. They owned their own home and had a nice car. In comparison, the Rausch family was the typical blue collar suburban family in Upper Darby.

Pete reminded me of this episode when we were six or seven years old. I was curious why Pete needed a hearing aid. The hearing aid was a box about the size of a small pack of cigarettes and was worn in a harness under the shirt. The cord was visible from the collar and had a conspicuous earpiece. I asked Pete why he needed a hearing aid. He told me it was because he couldn't hear. I got into an argument with him about it and whispered something to him. He understood my whisper and he answered. I yelled at him in a funny tone, "See, you can hear." He called me a "dummy" and said, "That's why I'm wearing a hearing aid to help me hear."

Pete was, or should I say is, one of the most remarkable people I ever met. Talking to him today he doesn't think so, but he was. My dad didn't like him because Pete was deaf and pop often told me Pete was the cause of some of the things that came up missing around the house. I knew Pete and he was honest and didn't steal. Later in life I learned the culprit lived in our household; I'll save that story for later.

Being deaf and growing up in a hearing world meant overcoming obstacles most of us could never comprehend, and don't want to understand, because the disability doesn't affect us. Pete on the other hand had to endure and overcome the disability he acquired because of a childhood disease called mumps. Pete was raised in a hearing world. He learned to read lips, understood body language, and had visual acuity that could match an eagle's. Pete had to adapt to a hearing world and put up with a lot of teasing and ridicule from other kids.

One day Jim, Pete, and I were walking down the street surveying the damage after a real destructive rain storm blew through the neighborhood. There were trash cans, debris, leaves, and tree limbs in the street. We were walking when suddenly Pete pushes Jim and me out of the way, just as a large tree limb crackles and snaps as it falls to the ground where we were standing. This branch was about eight inches thick and weighed several hundred pounds. Had we been hit we would have been seriously injured. We were astonished that none of us got hurt. Perplexed, Jim and I look at one another realizing that Pete, the one who couldn't hear, kept us from getting crunched by an eight inch thick tree branch. How did he do it? I say Pete had a sixth sense. Somehow his body compensated for his hearing loss by giving him an acuity Jim and I didn't have. Jim and I often were walking with Pete when he saw things on the ground long before we saw them. Pete once saw a ten dollar bill in the gutter by the curb, ran, and picked it up. It was clearly too far away for me to see and Jim didn't see it either.

This brings me to a topic I would like to discuss; sense, the senses, and sensibility. Pete had more of them than most. Pete was often picked on or teased, being verbally and physically abused by a lot of people. Pete never took advantage of another person

because of a frailty or a weakness. He had the sense to recognize it was wrong. Was it because he had been the target of senseless criticisms? Or did Pete have more of a pure character than we did?

When Jim, Pete, and I got together we had a lot of fun. We were very competitive by nature and often would engage in senseless arguments that would end up with us either getting into a fight or going home and not speaking until an apology was offered. I guess this was a childhood ritual we all went through.

This leads me to a valuable lesson in friendship. As much as we want to offer advice to someone, don't! Never offer advice unless it is solicited. If you have a friend who is about to do something you disagree with, bite your tongue. Unless you think the advice is worth putting your friendship on the line, don't offer it. Let me repeat myself! The rule for giving advice to friends is- Don't! When you give advice to a friend, be prepared to lose your friendship if the advice was unsolicited. I have learned this lesson over and over. I once said to my nephew who was having marital problems- "Let me give you a piece of advice- never take advice from anybody in the family." That is probably the best advice I ever gave to anybody. I guess I need to practice what I preach.

As I mentioned, children had a way of entertaining themselves. All of us kids in the neighborhood used to get together and play a game called kick the can. I'll bet over ten million kids played that game in the sixties. It was such a simple game. If you took the time to evaluate its benefits the game provided you with valuable life learning experience. I know you think I'm crazy, but I'm not. At least I don't think I am.

Kick the can is a game where one person is designated as "it." When we were growing up we played a lot of games where someone was "it." For example, tag, Marco

Polo, hide and seek, red light green light, and kick the can. The rules were pretty simple. The person that was chosen to be “it” would place the can at the designated safe area, usually right in the middle of Madison Ave. in front of Pete Rausch’s house. As many of the kids in the neighborhood who wanted to play could play as long as they followed the rules.

The person that was “it” would count to fifty or a hundred while everyone else ran and hid. The object of the game was to find someone, race back to the can, put their foot on it, and yell their name. That person was captured and had to sit out. There usually were about six or seven people sitting out as the game continued. If someone ran up and kicked the can before the person that was “it” could get to it, put their foot on it and yell that person’s name, everyone sitting out was freed to continue playing the game. If everyone was caught then the game was over. Now the first person caught was “it;” we could play this game for hours often until darkness when everybody had to go home.

What guiding principles of life did you learn playing kick the can. Think about it. The game required strategy, leadership, competitive spirit, stealth, social skills, and playing by the rules. In comparison what do you learn playing today’s modern video games when your opponent is miles away and the purpose is killing him in as many ways, with as many weapons as possible. There are many lessons to be learned by violent video games. The problems our society face are the lessons that need to be unlearned.

What happened to going outside and playing with friends? How about just making friends? As a parent you should be concerned if your child is not interacting with people from their same age group. While some kids lead a normal life interacting with younger

or older age groups, be cautious. Monitor it and look for red flags or signs of social dysfunction. Limit the time your kids spend in front of the computer.

The social networks children and teenagers have today are completely different than the past. Kids today can sit at a computer and play a video game with a complete stranger halfway around the world. At the same time they have their cell phones in their hand text messaging a girl from class about a date or an assignment, and are simultaneously watching a movie on a DVD player. Now you tell me we aren't raising a society of multi-taskers. Heck, most of us can't even send a text message without misspelling half the words, assuming we even know how to send a text message.

There is not a parent out there that can keep pace with the thought processes of a technologically savvy teenager. I suggest parents encourage their children to be the best they can be when it comes to technology. I also recommend you don't throw in the towel and surrender parental responsibility. I strongly warn parents to be aware of what their kids are doing online so they do not become the victim of a predator.

Youth can have its advantages over age and wisdom. You have to wonder where the reckless abandon and fearlessness in a child comes from. One day a bunch of us were playing in the street on Madison Ave. We heard sirens from fire trucks going down Cedar Lane. About five minutes later one of the older boys was riding frantically on his bicycle excitedly yelling about a kid that climbed the tower supporting the high voltage electric transmission lines in Naylor's Run Park by the railroad tracks. Apparently, the electrical current arced from the wire through the boy to the steel girder. We all ran down the street to State Road where the railroad tracks and the transmission lines snaked their way through Naylor's Run Park. The boy was still on the pole thirty or forty feet above. The

police were trying to keep the onlookers back and the firemen were trying to get the boy down.

The sad part of the story is the boy climbed the pole on a dare from his friends. None of his friends were anywhere around while the youngster was being rescued. I wish I didn't the outcome. The boy was dead. I remember seeing how black his arms were. I do know this. I never once had the urge to climb one of those towers after seeing the fireman bring the limp bodied boy down from the tower. I prayed for him and I hope he survived which he didn't

A dare is a powerful motivator. Think about it. How many times have you seen a child do something you dared him not to do? Peer pressure is often on a dare. If you were to study the most destructive dares in history what would it be? Were the crusades started on a dare? Did Hitler try to conquer the world because he was dared not to? Teaching a child the self control to resist taking on the challenge of a dare is a good lesson.

I was watching a movie called *The Greatest Game Ever Played*. It was a coming of age story about a young golfer, Francis Ouimet who played in the United States Amateur Championship at Massachusetts' Brookline Country Club in 1923. Ouimet was the son of immigrant working class parents. He was invited to play in the championship solely because of his talent for the game of golf. Golf was a rich man's game and he was not from a wealthy family. In the final playoff round it was British golf legend Harry Vardon playing Francis Ouimet. Vardon, the best golfer in the world at the time, was a stroke behind the match and decided to hit a shot over the trees to shorten the hole. He succeeded. Ouimet saw the shot, and prepared to do the same thing. He reached for a club out of his bag to copy his opponents play. His ten year old caddy, Eddie Lowery, stopped

him and convinced him to play it safe. Ouimet listened. Vardon's ball was in a sand trap, Ouimet was in the fairway. Young Francis went on to win the match.

When we are living life we don't have caddy's to help us make decisions. We have to make them on our own. We need to teach our children not to be susceptible to stupid dares, in particular hazardous ones. Ten year old Eddie Lowery had wisdom beyond his years. He ended up one of the most successful automobile dealers in California on the Monterrey Peninsula where he sold Lincolns. In fact I think he gave Ben Hogan his first job. He is also the only golf caddie to appear on a postage stamp.

Chapter Nineteen Push it to the Limits

In my life do you think I played it safe or was I a risk taker? The lesson- play it safe! Aw! Come on! This is Bobby we're talking about. Do you really think I would play it safe?

One summer my oldest sister Marge was moving from Ohio to Upper Darby. Her husband Jim was working in insurance sales. They came to live with us and were in the process of buying a house. I think I was eight or nine years old. Marge had three kids, and I think she was pregnant. Jimmy was seven, Johnny was six, and Cathy was three or four. I'm probably a little off on our ages. I had the greatest summer with my nephews living with us. We had a lot of company that summer and every weekend seemed like a party, bar-b-que, or picnic. Jimmy, John and I would get into so much mischief. We were always running around playing, hollering and having a good time.

The most amazing thing is the burden it must have been on my mother and father having them move into the house. There were extra mouths to feed, logistics of where people were going to sleep, and the mere inconvenience of a daughter who my parents

must have thought was married off and now was moving back, with her husband and a few kids. There was no telling how long they would be living there.

I want to emphasize that my parents were the most caring and giving when it came to welcoming people into the home. I don't know the circumstance why Marge, Jim and the kids moved back to Upper Darby. But I can tell you this, no matter what our financial situation was my mother and father would never turn family or friends away.

If you can provide help to deserving family members- do it! The key word here deserves. Jim found a job in the insurance industry.

By the end of the summer Marge and Jim found a house on Lincoln Ave. off of Garrett Road. Across the street was a large lot that was a run down park. There was a large apartment building called Garrettford Apartments on the corner. The house on Lincoln Ave was a second home to me. I spent many nights there. I remember there was a large cherry tree in the back yard that had the sweetest Cherries you ever tasted. The only problem was the tree was diseased, rotting, and eventually had to be cut down. I had many cherry pies as a kid.

I really think I could write a book on how big Jim, my brother in law and a notorious control freak controlled or rationed the cherries they picked off that tree. I swear he was freakish about his prized crop of cherries. I'm thinking that Jimmy, Johnny, and I were on the receiving end of more than one punishing moment for climbing the tree to grab a few cherries.

One of the fun things about walking the two miles to their house was the mile you cut off by taking a short cut through Naylor's Run Park.

I was very young and I often recklessly walked to their house to play with my nephews. There were times I walked over there and had to walk home because they weren't there. The times I did catch them home I was never turned away. My sister Marge was a lot like my mother. She was generous and very forgiving of transgressions; unlike big Jim. I cannot tell you how many times I was at the receiving end of his retribution. Now, don't get me wrong, it was deserved. Big Jim was not abusive or overly punitive. He was just a mean son of a gun if you made him mad. As wild as I was I made him angry a lot.

Being older than Jimmy and Johnny I used to tease them a lot. In fact John and I used to tease Jimmy because he was always reading. John and I wanted Jimmy to go play outside with us but he stayed in the house, kicked back on his dad's recliner and had a book in his hand.

At that age I was reading the *Hardy Boys* detective series. Jimmy, on the other hand, was reading adult science fiction. Not only was he reading it but he understood it. Even into my late teen years I teased Jimmy about being a bookworm for reading all the time. Funny thing though; the joke was on me.

Jimmy eventually graduated from Cornell University with a degree in astral physics and computer science. He went on to work for Disney and was one of the developers of computer animation for motion pictures. He currently has two technical awards from the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Science or Technical Academy Awards. He was eventually inducted in the Hall of Fame at Upper Darby Senior High School.

Jimmy is a fine example of how education, work ethic, and family values inspired another ordinary fellow to do something extraordinary. Jimmy is a great guy and would give you the shirt off his back. I could write a book on all the great things he has done for his nephews, nieces, and all the other family members. Here I go again, getting ahead of myself.

I spent a lot of time at Marge and Jim's house. Since I was the oldest I often led Jimmy, John, and Cathy astray. We could walk the longest distances to the weirdest places. There were a lot of places that were off limits but we went there anyway. On Lansdowne Ave. there was a private school, some kind of "Friend's Academy" that had a playground. There was a four foot fence and the gate was locked. Instead of walking a couple blocks to the public playground I led the four of us to the private school where we climbed the fence to play on a playground that was "posted, private property, keep out." Aside from the fact we walked nearly a mile and a half to get there. My sister and brother in law were frantic when they got a call about the trespassing.

One thing about my brother in law Jim, he punished me the same as his own children. That was the standing orders from my parents. The same thing applied if I were at Jim or Pete's house. My parents didn't want me to get away with bad conduct; whether I was at home, or at someone else's house. When I was in the care of others they had permission to punish me, even if it meant corporal punishment.

Almost every kid likes to go swimming, I was no different. We didn't have that many legitimate opportunities and this was a favorite pastime of mine.

Marg and Jim had a membership to the Lansdowne swim club. It wasn't cheap taking your kids to a club swimming. We were often guests at the club. There were strict

rules and the lifeguards weren't supposed to be disobeyed. You couldn't run, dive except from the diving boards, play rough, piggy back, toss one another, or do anything that might be fun or cause you to drown.

You also had to pass a certain swim test to dive off the diving boards. You had to jump into the deep end and swim from one end of the pool and back without floundering. I think the lifeguards had a blast making kid's swim back and forth just for fun. At the Lansdowne swim club it was kind of a right of passage or a special privilege for a ten year old to jump from the high diving board. When I passed my swimming test I was prepared to take the plunge. First came snack time. My sister had this rule that you had to wait thirty minutes from the time you ate or drank something before you could go back in the pool. Every time the thirty minutes were up and I was ready to jump back in the pool the lifeguards would blow the whistle and call for an adult's only swim. What luck? I couldn't count the number of times I was next in line on the diving board when the whistle blew for all the kids to get out of the pool. There is no worse anxiety than waiting for the lifeguard to blow the whistle again and allow for open swimming. If you misbehaved and got whistled at you had to get out of the pool and sit on a green wooden bench. If you got benched too many times or you refused to sit on the bench or you were ejected for the day. You've gotten to know Bobby by now. How much time did he spend on the bench compared to the water? Man I swear I had a bathing suit full of splinters from all the time I spent on that bench.

I'll tell you something special about my sister Marge. She eventually had six children. Every summer, for one or two weeks, Marge and Jim would rent a house down the Jersey Shore in Sea Isle City. My brother Mike and I would often spend a weekend

and sometimes a whole week with them. Marge would drag the eight of us around shopping and walking on the boardwalk. People would ask Marge- “Are they all your kids?” Marge got a kick out of the comments people made about her shuffling all the kids along. I was pretty close with Jimmy and John; we had a lot of fun times together. I was scared of my brother in law Jim. When he got mad and would scream he scared the living daylights out of me. His form of discipline worked for me. I obeyed!

There was a family lived down the street from us on Cedar Lane. There were two sisters. Beth that was my age and Lisa was a year younger. They were my friends and I played with them a lot. Their dad was a friendly man and I think he liked the idea of having a boy around the house. They tolerated me until I misbehaved. They also had a four foot deep swimming pool in the back yard. Having a pool wasn't real common then, and if you had a pool you were suddenly popular. At first I was invited to go swimming quite often; but I had a sinus problem when I went swimming and the chlorine would knock my snot locker loose. I'd constantly have a runny nose and that kind of grossed out their parents, knowing their pool was the receptacle for my snot. Back then electric pool filters were expensive so you cleaned the pool by hand. Needless to say, after the first time they drained the pool to clean it I wasn't invited back too swim. Beth's Mom once unintentionally insulted me by suggesting I skip regular subjects in High School and try Vocational Technical School. I don't think she thought I was very smart. My problem was I as too smart. I was just on the wild side.

Since the topic is swimming let me mention Barney's

Barney's bar on West Chester Pike was owned by a man that had a small farm with a pond. Pop drank many a shot and a beer at Barneys. The owner used to let the

neighborhood kids go swimming. He would either truck them to his farm or would have groups meet at the bar and caravan out to his farm. Both my older brothers and I used to go to Barney's swimming hole with their friends. This was a kind of a ritual where many of the neighborhood kids forged lifetime bonds after meeting at Barney's pond. It was dug out of the earth in a large rectangle and had walls made from limestone rocks. There was a home made wooden diving board and the pond was shallow on one end and deeper on the other. Everyone had a blast at Barney's pond. Sometimes you would bring a cooler with some Cool-aide or just cold water and a couple peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. One thing about swimming, it always made you hungry.

As all good things, this too came to an end. I don't know if somebody got hurt at the pond or Barney got ill, or even died. It was sudden when the swimming at Barneys ended.

Eventually the bar changed owners and became Busty's. It was, and still is a Highland Park landmark. The ironic thing is, my father, sisters, brothers, and I, as a rite of passing, have all had a few drinks at Busty's when we were old enough. Whenever the family meets in Upper Darby we'll eat at Pica's and sneak down to Busty's and have a beer. The son of the last owner runs the place. His dad, Jack Chiccola died from cancer. He was a super guy and really knew how to run the bar. Long before that Mary Busty used to host Monday Night Football and make the best hot dogs and sauerkraut. I saw many of my grade school friends at Busty's.

When it comes to alcohol, in moderation, it is not so bad. However, when it becomes a habit, alcohol can ruin your life. Alcoholism is, and always has been, rampant in our society. It is hereditary in many families and touches generation after generation.

Excessive drinking is also a very treatable and is very curable. The solution to the problem is the alcoholic has to recognize there is in fact a problem and he has to seek treatment. The most successful programs are the twelve step programs aligned with the philosophy of Alcoholics Anonymous. I can remember a friend of mine, John was always at Busty's getting wasted. He eventually found a good woman dried out and now has his problem under control.

Chapter Twenty Sports and Games

During the summer all the neighborhood kids used to get together and play a lot of games. When I was very young across the street from our house I used to play with three girls Rose, Joan and Carol. By the time all the kids gathered Beth and Lisa would join in. There were a dozen other kids that lived on the same block of Cedar Lane between Park Ave. and Madison Ave. Right across the street from the firehouse in front of the Johnson's house we would play a game called Red light Green Light. The usually designated person to be it was the light. The sidewalk was the imaginary road and we were the imaginary "cars". We would stand in a group a ways down the "street" The person who was the light would turn their back on the "cars." While their back was to you could walk toward the light. The light person would turn around. Anyone still moving and caught by the light, ran the red light, and had to sit out of the game. If someone made it all the way to touch the light that person won. If the light caught everyone that person won. We played this game for hours.

If you think about it; we were our own referees, played fair, and we all got along. Rarely, if ever was there an argument or a fight. Left alone, kids do a pretty good job of policing themselves. Oftentimes it's when the adults join in that problems start. Think

about it. How many little league practices do the kids get into conflict? How many pick up games where the kids compete against one another does it turn into a fight? Well, add the variables of organization, referees, and parents as spectators and the recipe is for disaster. In the 1960's we didn't have that problem. Now there are leagues where the parents have to complete on line classes to learn how to be a spectator before they will let their children compete. Go figure! I can't tell you how many assault calls I responded to because a parent wanted to fight a coach, referee or another parent.

By the way, go figure, is one of my cop out sayings, when I cannot come up for a reasonable explanation for behavior.

Generally speaking Pete Rausch, Jim Mahoney, and I were always hanging out together, except for the summer. The Mahoney's owned a house at the Jersey Shore in Margate so we didn't see much of Jim in the summer.

There were other guys in our group, Dave and Mike Reccutti, Rob York, The Potts Brothers; you saw them in the summer because they attended the Hershey's Boys school during the school year.

I don't remember how old we were the summer Pete and I learned how to play chess. Pete was grounded for some reason or another and I had to go over his house everyday. He wasn't allowed to leave the boundaries of his house as punishment. I would go over his house and we would sit on the front porch. We would play marathon chess matches. Some games would take a few minutes and there were others that took hours. I was a better opener than Pete, but Pete was a much better strategist, could play a great middle game, and close with a well calculated check mate. I won a few games now and

then and even had a few good runs. Overall, Pete was a better chess player. We learned a lot about each other sitting on that porch.

Pete's mom would bring out some Cool-aide or cold water and occasionally a snack. I think Pete's mom wanted to lift the restriction but his dad was adamant that the punishment stick. Pete would get on a roll where he'd check mate me in six moves, occasionally I'd trap him, but the games went fast and furious.

Pete's dad was sitting in the living room looking out onto the porch. He was drinking beer watching baseball. He yelled out the screen door. "You guys don't know how to play chess." "It takes hours to play a game of Chess."

It is true we weren't Bobby Fischer but we knew the rules and played by them. We would argue about whether a move was permanent because the hand or finger was taken off the piece. We would trade piece for piece in a war of attrition. We would race pawns to the other end of the board to get a queen. It was fun trying to checkmate one another with only a bishop, pawn, and the king leading the charge. Day after day for hours on end we played chess until Pete's restriction was finally lifted.

Board games were very popular, particularly when two bored boys didn't have anything else to do. We played Risk, Stratego, and Monopoly for hours on end. Sometimes, at the end of an evening when it was time to go home, a game was put aside until the next day when the battle would begin again. I can remember four or five of us playing Risk for hours and hours sometimes the game lasted two days.

In those days we had our disagreements, arguments, and occasional fist fights; sometimes over meaningless, petty issues. Friendship and loyalty dictated the unconditional forgiveness of one another's transgressions. Sometimes that's what

friendship is all about. We all say things we don't mean. You have to remember; once you say something that hurts or scars somebody you cannot take it back. Only time, a sincere apology, and the willingness to forgive will heal that kind of wound.

Growing up, Pete was an easy target for bullies. Even Jim and I occasionally took advantage of his hearing impairment. We were all sitting on Pete's porch. Jim and I would be talking in a normal voice. Then on cue we would stop talking aloud but keep lip syncing the conversation. Pete would turn up his hearing aid. Then Jim and I would raise our voice causing Pete's hearing aid to squeal and whistle. Pete would get so mad. In his defense Pete got the best of us many times.

When it came to running Pete was lightening fast. I mean to tell you he could run and had a lot of endurance. I never once beat Pete in a sprint foot race. He was also a pretty good athlete and an avid sports fan. I never could answer Pete's sports trivia questions.

When we were sitting together we used to tell stories and jokes to keep ourselves amused. Something very important about Pete escaped me and I never understood it until one day, just a few years ago in an e-mail, Pete dropped an emotional bombshell on me that sent shivers down my spine.

When we were in groups and were sitting around talking someone might be telling a joke. We would listen to the joke and the punch line and have a good laugh. Pete always laughed along with us even if he was the brunt of the joke. I always believed Pete had a great sense of humor. No matter where you are there are background noises most of us filter out and never pay attention to. With Pete background noise was interference. The simple process of day to day communication with Pete meant the messages were not

always received because he could not hear the complete message. Pete told me all the years we were together telling jokes and stories he would nod in recognition, laugh on cue, and even comment on occasion. The problem for Pete was he rarely heard the joke, or understood the punch line. I mean to tell you I was floored.

I was truly the one who was impaired because in my entire life I was never cognizant of the true scope of Pete's disability. We assumed Pete heard and understood us. I never knew and I am ashamed to say I was oblivious to it.

While my lack of understanding of what it meant to be hearing impaired was unintentional, I knew a lot of people that intentionally shunned Pete because of his deafness. The truth of the matter is; Pete had more character than anyone of us because he took everything that was thrown at him. No matter how hard he was knocked down and hit the ground, he got right back up and fought back. A boy with lesser resilience would have given up. Not Pete!

I remember many times I got into a fight with Pete. Generally, no matter who won the contest Pete would be the one who would get hurt. Not because he was injured, generally his hearing aid would get damaged or broken. This was Pete's means of comprehending the hearing world. His father was a working man and buying another hearing aid or even getting the damaged one fixed was a burden on the family finances. Pete would often get punished for the broken hearing aid.

Not only were we as kids insensitive to Pete so were the adults. I cannot tell you how many times my parents or one of my sisters or brothers would make fun of me because I was playing with the deaf and dumb kid.

Let me tell you something right now. Pete may have been deaf but he was never dumb. The dumb ones were us for being so stupid not realizing the hurdles Pete had to overcome to stay on a level playing field with the hearing world.

If I could live it all over again I would become the champion for those with disabilities. (Later in life in my Law Enforcement career I kept that promise.) I would never let them be the brunt of a joke. I would not let someone pick on them either. God forbid! Parents don't teach their children to respect other children with disabilities. Wouldn't the world be a better place if parents would encourage children to befriend someone who happened to be a little different? I guess that's asking for too much. Heck! Parents are the ones encouraging their children to be the bullies. The common comment is- They are just being children.

Chapter Twenty One- More on Sportsmanship

One of the most coveted little league sports in Highland Park was fast pitch softball. We played at Sellers field. The ball was smaller than the customary softball and the field had a very short right field fence limiting batters to a double when they hit it over the fence.

I was the worst player on the Cubs. Pete was on the Cardinals. I had to be the smallest player in the league. The uniform didn't fit and I had to nearly loop the belt twice around my waist to get the pants to stay up. I couldn't catch a ball for the life of me. I was the most dangerous batter in the league because if I did hit the ball, which was seldom, I threw the bat nearly killing the catcher or umpire. I couldn't tell you how many times I was walked but got thrown out trying to run to second base. I had to be the slowest runner.

Many times I would be running from first to second when the batter hit one into the outfield and would catch me before I reached third base. Despite some players poor play the coach, Mr. Chambers, encouraged every player to do their best and keep trying. He would encourage me and even spent extra time trying to teach me how to play baseball. He put me in right field for at least two of the seven innings. If we were winning he might let me stay in longer. I can honestly say I never learned how to play baseball. My most embarrassing time playing for the Cubs was when we were practicing at the Beverly Hills Junior High front baseball field and I was in the outfield wildly trying to catch fly balls and I wet my pants. There weren't any bathrooms and I was just obeying Mr. Chambers and staying in the outfield. My proudest moment was playing right field and I actually caught a fly ball from a Kid named Nick who used to pick on me. He was one of those big kids that started shaving a couple days after he was born. I caught the third out and it ended the inning. We had the very best softball fast pitcher in Delaware County. Jimmy Wagner. He went on to pitch in many organized leagues. He eventually married his sweetheart, bought a house in Upper Darby and raised a family. He is a class guy and the typical example of someone who has family values and work ethic.

I wish I could thank Mr. Chambers for his patience coaching me. One lesson I learned from Coach Chambers made a lasting impression on me. He used to stand up for everybody on his team even the little guy. You can take this to the bank; I will always stand up for the little guy. Many times growing up, I had the opportunity but was too self absorbed to care. Today! That is not the case. Mr. Chambers two sons Jody and Greg were pretty good athletes in their own right.

Pete and I used to go to Highland Park Elementary School in the summers where they had public recreation sponsored by the Township of Upper Darby. The school was an old stone structure and had asphalt playing fields. No kidding! The playground, basketball courts, and baseball diamonds were all asphalt. There were a lot of skinned knees in the summer.

One of the most fun games was box hockey. Now get this I can remember lines at the box hockey all day waiting for a turn. The game was simple and if properly supervised was very safe. There was an eight foot by four foot box made of two by ten boards separated in the middle by another board. There were two four inches by four inches square tunnels in the middle boards and two square tunnels at each end.

Each player had a stick similar to a wooden dowel or broom handle rounded at the ends. The puck was a two inches by two inches block of wood. The puck was set on the top of the middle board. The players on either side of the box would touch sticks to the ground and cross them banging them together as if they were swords. On the third strike the quickest player would knock the puck into the opponent's side of the box trying to knock it through the end square hole winning a point or often the game. If the puck remained in play the players took turns shooting it through the two square holes in the middle board trying to score knocking the puck through the opponent's goal. The winner continued playing until defeated.

Box hockey had all kinds of variations, from no feet in the box to one foot in the box. There were games like dragging, speed hitting, and knuckle banging. The less supervision and older the players were the more hazardous box hockey got. There were a few broken fingers, cut hands, bruised shins and kids ejected from the playground over a

not so friendly game of box hockey. In less than half a summer you could wear out the box. We went through pucks and sticks every week. If a mom was looking for the missing broom there was a good chance it was cut up for a box hockey stick or for a game of stickball. Once the box was worn out that was it. I can never remember a replacement box arriving in the same summer.

One day I had the opportunity to face off with a very mean kid named Eddie. He was stocky and had these real piercing green eyes. He was the same age as me, slightly red headed, and had real rough skin on his hands. He was the reigning box hockey champ for the day. I was the challenger and Eddie was asking what type of game I wanted to play. I don't know why but I challenged him to speed play with no feet in the box. You also couldn't let a foot go past the goal outside of the box. I told Eddie, "first one to score wins" and he laughed, shaking his head in agreement.

One of the mistakes I made was not realizing that the recreation counselor took a group of kids to the basketball court and therefore we had no supervision. I stooped across from Eddie and looked at him like I was going to beat the tar out of him. He was cocky and not the least bit intimidated. He was squinting at me like a gunfighter at the O. K. Corral. I was ambidextrous so I decided to play him left handed to throw him off.

The game started ever so slowly with me counting, "One" as the stick was tapped on the ground then banged across the opponents stick like a sword fight. "Two" and tapped on the ground again then the sticks were clashed with a loud clacking noise. Eddie was trying to knock the stick out of my hand. "Three" loudly and quickly we banged the sticks on the ground, smacked them together; when I wildly took a swing at the puck balanced on the middle board, just as Eddie was taking his swing. We clashed with me

hitting the puck and Eddie's knuckles with my stick really hard. The puck went into his side of the box and he was swearing at me swinging wildly. In a wild frenzy I was trying to hit the puck out of his goal and he was trying to hit it back into my side of the box. We went at it for about a minute when I got lucky and scored. I guess when I hit his knuckles I took some of the fight out of him.

Normally Eddie would have made an issue out of me hitting his knuckles. He was bleeding a little bit and I fully expected him to retaliate by punching me or tackling me on the asphalt. For some reason he just glared, threw his stick in the box, and walked away. Later I found out I actually broke his finger and he was in too much pain to start a fight. I got lucky, that day. Eddie got his due and I would soon get mine.

Public recreation had all kinds of activities. The list included softball, basketball, box ball, stick ball, board games, arts and crafts and plays. The most popular arts and crafts were the lanyards, Popsicle stick art and wicker baskets the kids made. Honestly, as hard as I tried, I don't think I ever made anything that resembled something useful.

To this day I still cannot braid, draw, paint, sing, act, or glue something together without making a mess. One of my sayings throughout my life has always been. "If this was the old west and I walked into a saloon; I'd have to draw on the gun fighter and shoot it out." Why? "Because I don't sing, dance, or play the piano." I also don't like drinking cheap whiskey shots.

If there was ever a young man that I'd like to thank for his supervision and imagination in creating fun and games for us kids it was a guy named Walt. He worked one summer at Highland Park Elementary School as a recreation counselor. I learned a lot from him and he treated all the kids with respect and dignity. He kept a lot of kids out

of trouble that one summer. I wonder if the reason he didn't come back was because we drove him off the deep end and ran him off. Nah! He probably went on to bigger and better things. What college student in his right mind would baby sit a bunch of screaming, whiny, snot nosed kids. I was a pain in the butt sometimes and don't know how or why Walt didn't kill me. If I could tell Walt anything is- I learned to dribble a basketball but I'm still a hack!

There was a game we called chink. We used this ten inch rubber inflated red ball. You spent time in line and bounced the ball against the wall. It could only bounce once and the next player had to run and hit the ball against the wall and it had to bounce once behind a line. Or you could grab the ball and throw it at another player. If you missed you got a letter. If you hit the person they got a letter. If you botched your chance to bounce the ball into the wall you got a letter. Each player that got all five of the letters was out. When you hit the ball and it contacted the wall and ground simultaneously it was referred to as being chinked on the ground without a bounce. If you chinked the ball the next player in line got the letter. We played the game in a gentle manner with the younger kids or rough throwing the ball hard trying to take one another's head off. I had many bruises from that red rubber ball.

One of the challenges for the counselor at summer recreation was getting the kids from different neighborhoods to get along. Walt was pretty strict and he would banish you for a few days, week or even the whole summer if you were unruly or a constant miscreant.

I was at summer recreation and it was a very hot muggy day. There was this kid Johnny from Kirklynn, a neighborhood adjoining Highland Park, He wasn't a regular

attendee of summer recreation but he was in the same grade as I was and we went to the St. Laurence together. Johnny had this almost white hair and he was a little taller than me. I didn't like him and he didn't like me. There were a lot of kids at recreation and we had a lot of competitive games going. For some reason we got this game of dodge ball going. There were about fifteen of us. I was in the crowd of dodgers and Johnny was throwing the ball. Well he kept trying to hit me. I kept dodging his throws. Then he threw it when I was very close to him. He hit me smack in the face and I got a bloody nose. I was really mad. I went to the bathroom and cleaned up. The counselor sent Johnny home because he knew he did it on purpose. Kids can be cruel sometimes. Life is not always a picnic and you have to live it; particularly through the bad times. I just filed the incident away.

There was no summer recreation on the weekends. Pete and I went to the school anyway to hit some balls. Lo and behold there was Johnny. He was by himself. I started an argument with him and we got into a fight. Now remember, the ball fields are asphalt so there wasn't any grass to wrestle around on. We got into a grappling hold and started swinging at each other. Neither of us could land a punch. I got this wild idea that I would knee him in the chest. I tried to knee him hard, just as he was ducking down. I caught him square on the middle of the hardest part of the forehead. All you heard was a loud crack. We both fell backwards onto the ground. I was holding my knee and Johnny was holding his head. Neither of us could get up. We were both moaning in pain.

Pete was standing there holding and baseball gloves, bat, and ball looking at us like we were a couple of screwballs. I couldn't stand up. My knee was hurt and Johnny had this knot on his forehead. We both looked at each other and started laughing.

We called the fight a draw. Pete and Johnny had to help me to my feet. I thought I broke my knee and couldn't walk on it. Johnny and Pete were holding me up. I finally was able to walk on it. Johnny went home and Pete and I went home. I'm just glad Johnny didn't tell his parents he was in a fight with me. I would have gotten in big trouble. Pete didn't tell but I had to come up with a story on how I hurt my knee.

I never did find out what Johnny told his mom. We did become friends after that fight and actually had a couple good laughs telling the story.

Chapter Twenty-Two Neighborhood Games

Pete, Jim, and I used to play stick ball all the time. We would use a broom handle and a rubber ball. The ball was a small rubber ball; some had dimples on them, and some were smooth. Sometimes we would scrounge up a bunch of dimple balls and cut them in half. When you pitched a half ball it would curve funny and sometimes curve, slide and rise all in the same pitch. A half ball was much harder to hit.

The pitcher would play against the batter. Sometimes we had two or three person teams. If you hit the ball on the ground it was a single. Over the pitchers head was a double or triple and across the street was a home run.

When you used a whole rubber ball you used a wall or steps behind you as the catcher- bouncing the ball back to you. One strike or a foul was an out. Three outs and the players rotated. Since you were pitching a distance of about twenty feet you could really get some wild speed on the ball. Not only did the ball come in hot if you got hit it hurt. I wonder how many of our parents broom handles we swiped to find a stick ball bat. That's another story. Mom's got pretty good at hiding the broom until they made you sweep up a mess you made.

We used to play stick ball for hours. When you couldn't find a stick you used a step and played step ball. You just threw the ball against the step trying to get it past your opponent in the air or ground. Stick ball is still played throughout the Northeast. You had to be a pretty quick fielder sometimes because the ball would often roll in the gutter and it would go down a sewer.

The metal sewer covers were heavy; we managed to pry them up and would have to climb down the dark, damp, mud and dirt encrusted, nasty, sewer to retrieve the ball. We lost quite a few balls of all types that rolled down the pipes.

On many days the temperature was nearly a hundred degrees. Pete and I would grab baseball bats, balls, and gloves and walk the six blocks to Highland Park Elementary School. We would pace off a distance from the wall and fence separating St Laurence School and Highland Park Elementary. We would be on the asphalt baseball field. We played a game called fence ball. The distance you had to hit the ball clearing the fence was a little more than we would normally hit the ball. I would be in the "Outfield" standing about fifteen or twenty feet from the fence. Pete would be the batter. The batter would toss the ball in the air and try to hit it over the fence. One strike was an out, a foul ball was out, and catching a ball in the air or on the ground was an out. To score the batter would have to hit the ball between two designated foul posts. A ball hit on the ground rolling to the wall or was not caught was a single, if you hit the wall in the air it was a double, hitting the fence in the air was a triple and over the fence was a home run. Three outs and the sides changed. We played the game for hours on end. Being Kids we pretended we were famous major leaguers. We would make spectacular catches, long hits

at the fence and occasionally the outfielder would be climbing over the fence to retrieve a home run. Our game was called *Fence Ball*.

I once found an autographed baseball in a drawer. The ball belonged to Uncle Harvey. He got the ball autographed when he played for the Philadelphia Phillies in 1927 as a pinch hitter. I took it and played ball with it outside and I lost it. Uncle Harvey was furious as it was autographed by Babe Ruth. Fortunately, he didn't stay angry at me.

The other thing that was special to him was an ashtray that had a golf ball screwed onto it. It was a hole in one trophy. He was playing golf at Llanarch Country Club. My brother Brad was caddying for him. Uncle Harvey got a hole in one after he hit a ball into the trees and bounced it back into play, it rolled down a hill, across the green into the hole. I broke his golf ball mounted ashtray too.

Occasionally, we got enough kids together to play touch football in the street. Rarely were the sides even and the games were sometimes nearly tackle. The most coveted players in the neighborhood were the athletically inclined. The best athlete on Madison Ave was an older kid named John.

Chapter Twenty Three- Success, Family and Friends

John Cappeletti was much older than us and was always playing organized sports. He started playing football and basketball with the St. Laurence Catholic Youth Organization or C.Y.O. He went to Monsignor Bonner High School and was a great high school basketball player and football quarterback. He convinced the coach not to cut my brother Mike from the freshman basketball team. Mike walked like a duck, was slow, and

couldn't play great defense. But! My brother could shoot from any distance and score and he could take anybody to the basket. Mike made the team.

John Cappelletti might have even participated in track and field and maybe even baseball, but I don't remember. He went on to play college football and won the Heismann Trophy while playing football at Penn State. John Cappelletti was a great running back and helped Penn State win a national championship.

The Cappelletti family was a role model for family values, work ethic, importance of education, and Catholic moral principles. Mr. Cappelletti was a master carpenter and was probably the best carpenter in the Philadelphia area. Mrs. Cappelletti was one of the most respected mothers in Upper Darby. The Cappelletti family was and still epitomizes the tradition of Upper Darby.

Joey Cappelletti was a year or two younger than I, and was the most courageous boy I ever met. He contracted Leukemia and suffered through years of chemotherapy treatment. Joey, as sick as he was, would still go out and play in a little league game or play ball in the street. There was nothing he was afraid of. I teased him a few times, seeing he was struggling, and if there was ever something I could ask forgiveness for; it would be from Joey for teasing him. As a kid I had no idea what he was going through.

The disease took Joey's life but not his spirit. I can guarantee you he is swinging at pitches and running the bases in heaven. There was a movie made about Joey Cappelletti, the disease he had, and his relationship with his older brother John. It was called "*Something for Joey*." I recommend you watch it.

If there were one thing I could ask for it would be. If the time ever came where I was facing death and needed strength and courage; I hope, I could have the strength and courage, Joey had as he fought leukemia.

All summer long we played games and roamed the neighborhood. The games we played encouraged you to be competitive and taught you loyalty to your friends. Sometimes when a new kid joined in on the games we would target him with rough play.

Jim Mahoney had a friend we went to school with that was kind of wild. His name was John. He had red hair, freckles, and was quite a bit bigger than us. I wasn't real close to John but Jim was. I think I was in sixth or seventh grade, maybe about twelve or thirteen years old. We were building a tree house in Jim's back yard. John was in the tree; Jim and I were handing boards up to him. One of the boards slipped from his grip and fell about ten feet hitting me square on the top of the head. I was knocked out for a few seconds and had a nasty cut on my scalp. You never saw so much blood. When I came to my senses I noticed I was bleeding, was scared to death, and thought I was dying. I was screaming and crying. Mrs. Mahoney didn't drive and had to call my mom to take me to the hospital to get sewn up. One of the things my parents always told me was to be careful and not to get hurt. Well I never listened. I was always on the wrong end of the stick.

I ended up with stitches and a bald spot for a while. I steered clear of John and Jim and I didn't hang out for a while. I think I was embarrassed about crying like a baby rather than being mad at anyone.

John was a really good guy who would give you the shirt off his back. He later came to me and quietly apologized for nearly taking my head off. He had a heart of gold,

was tough as nails, and didn't have a scared bone in his body. One of the tragedies later in life was when John died of cancer. He was in his early twenties, His nickname was Crab.

One of the fears Mrs. Mahoney had for a time was that my mother was going to sue them and their homeowners insurance for my injuries. My mother and father were not rich, and certainly could have used the money from a lawsuit. However, my mother and father would never sue someone for financial advantage. My mother and father paid my emergency room bill and never once mentioned it to the Mahoney's.

Chapter Twenty Four Knocked out

Growing up I had this weird disorder. Somewhere in my central nervous system was a short circuit. If I was hit in just the right spot on my back or head I would pass out. Unfortunately, when I hit the ground I usually lost control of my bladder and pissed all over myself.

I cannot tell you the number of times I was hit, passed out, and wet my pants. Once in school a kid pushed me and I went backwards and a coat hook hit me in the back. I was out like a light for about fifteen seconds. I awoke and a nun was standing over me screaming at me for playing around. Luckily, I had just gone to the bathroom and didn't wet my pants. This sister of the fine religious order commenced to nearly beat the daylights out of me. Here I was being picked on by a bigger kid, I get knocked out, and this nun is boxing my ears back.

This other time I was knocked out was at Naylor's Run Park with Pete. We had a couple sticks and were pretending we were swashbuckling pirates and we were sword

fighting. Well Pete missed my stick and hit me square in the head. I went out like a burned out light bulb. I was lying on the ground, unconscious, and pissed my pants.

Now this scared the daylights out of Pete. He thought I was dead. He was shaking me and kind of upset, not really crying, but visibly shaken. As usual after about fifteen seconds I came too and was getting up when I realized I pissed my pants.

I didn't know if I should be mad at Pete for hitting me or running home while I was out. I think I had a few choice words for Pete and we weren't friendly for a while. I actually think I chased him for a while but really don't remember.

I did go down to the creek and "accidentally fall in" so I was totally wet when I got home. I didn't tell my mom or dad that I got knocked out and wet my pants.

Over time my sister Marilyn, who was a nurse, found out these episodes happened about six or seven times over the period of a year. Then one day playing with one of my nephews I got hit in the back and the lights went out. This time my sister witnessed it.

My mom and sister took me to this doctor who grilled me like I was a cheese sandwich. I melted and told him about all of the recent episodes where I passed out.

On each of the following occasions I passed out; I slipped on my roller skates, fell five feet out of a tree, was hit in the back with a hard ball, and fell backward on slippery concrete, got hit with a stick, was pushed against a coat rack, and was hit on the back.

This doctor wanted to put me in the hospital and do some test where they inject you with dye and take pictures of your brain. I jumped out of the chair, and started screaming. "You aren't putting me in some hospital! No Way! "Uh, uh, not a chance!" Fortunately, my sister took me to the doctor she worked for and we went through the forty questions. He convinced her and my mom that there was nothing wrong, and I

would out grow it. It had something to do with some underdeveloped nerve or blood vessels in my neck and they would eventually develop.

Frankly, I'm glad the doctor was right. Eventually, I did outgrow it. However, the pissing the pants thing, I got teased for that for years. After I grew out of it I was tougher than nails to put on the ground and I never passed out again. Speaking of falling on your head!

Do you remember the first skateboards? It was probably around 1967 or 1968. We took apart metal skates and screwed the front wheels on a board and got an apple crate to make a scooter. Well the scooter became a skate board and we all had one hidden from our parents. They were quite dangerous. There was this street that intersected State Road about three or four blocks from Madison Ave. the street had a steep one block long hill, we called Frickies Hill. We named the hill after the run down neighborhood grocery store at the bottom of the hill on the corner. Four or five of us would gather at the top of the hill, dodge traffic, and skateboard down.

This was a reckless feat as the speeds were too fast to control the wobbly board. Now remember, the wheels were steel, very slick, and there were no trucks invented yet. Except for balance there was no steering mechanism on the makeshift skateboard. We were daredevils and tried to take on the steep hill. There was a reason our parents didn't let us have a homemade skateboard. There were no pads, helmets, or safety gear. We got on the boards and zoomed down the hill. Rarely, did we make it to the bottom without wiping out. When you wiped out you got hurt. Asphalt is not forgiving and the road rash was painful. I slid on my butt and back more than I stood upright on the board. I don't know how I didn't get killed on that thing. I don't remember which one of us got the

broken arm but one of us did. All of us had bruises and road rash from the spills. The fad lasted only as long as we could stand the pain and trips to the emergency room.

The bicycle was the most reliable means of getting around the neighborhood. We didn't have a lot of money but my dad bought me this small green bicycle with twenty inch wheels. I loved it and would ride it around the neighborhood. There were no gears and the bike had the customary coaster brakes. It wasn't a fancy bike but it had utility getting me around the neighborhood. I tried to do some of the tricks other kids did but wasn't quite that good and within a few weeks all the accessories that came with the bike were broken and stripped off. The first casualty was the built in light under the center bar. Then the fenders got bent beyond repair. The next casualty was the bell and then the chain guard. By the end of the first summer the bike was just right. There wasn't anything else to break. For some weird reason this bike had the best steering of any bike I ever rode. I could go to the store for my mom and ride home with no hands holding the large paper bag of groceries. I could turn corners and pedal up hill without ever gripping the handlebars. Of course there were the occasional spills where I got careless.

I have to interrupt my train of thought and tell you this quick story about bicycle prowess.

Mom was going to cook spaghetti for dinner. She sent me to the store to buy Ragu spaghetti sauce. I had to ride up on West Chester Pike, dodge heavy traffic crossing the pike, to go to a neighborhood store that had the Ragu on sale. I had to pick up three large jars of spaghetti sauce. I dutifully rode my bike to the store and bought my mom the sauce and a pack of cigarettes. I don't know if she was still smoking the non-filter Philip Morris or she switched to the new filtered cigarettes. They still cost a little less than half a

dollar. The older man who was at the register was wearing a white apron over his denim jeans and flannel shirt. He was wearing these glasses that had thick plastic frames. The old guy was bald headed and had a red bulbous nose.

He was a little annoyed about me asking for the cigarettes. He gave me the third degree about buying the cigarettes, but he realized that I was still a little too young to take up smoking. He looked over the note while he was ringing up the items on the cash register. The old cash registers had large white numbers that popped up when you pushed the amounts. I was always taught to watch and count up in your head the amount rung up and make sure it matched the price on the jar. My mom pitched a fit if I brought home the wrong change. Every time he punched a key the bell would ring; then it would ring again when the cash register drawer opened. I had to add up the items to make sure the amounts matched. What was funny is it annoyed the old clerk because he thought I was being an arrogant pest.

He bagged up the items and wouldn't double bag them in the brown paper bag. He said bags are expensive and he only single bagged things. Well I was in a bit of a rush so I grabbed the bag and whisked out of the store.

I got on my bicycle and had a bit of a hard time trying to balance the bag and get started. I finally got moving and was riding no handed, holding the bag riding on the sidewalk. I went down a driveway and rode along the pike trying to cross Carole Blvd. I guess I didn't see a car or the color of the traffic signal when a car on Carol Blvd. trying to cross the pike almost hit me. I swerved and hit the curb, losing control of my bike. I tumbled onto the sidewalk. The bag was torn and fell in front of me breaking all three quart jars of spaghetti sauce. The spaghetti sauce and glass was all over the ground and I

was beet red covered with spaghetti sauce that resembled blood. Someone stopped and their first impression is I was cut from the fall and bleeding profusely. This person started screaming to call an ambulance. The series of unfortunate events continued. Where I fell was the entrance to a business. It was either hardware or an auto parts store. This hysterical lady was screaming at me. I was dazed trying to get up off the sidewalk and my bicycle was in the middle of the mess. The owner of the store came out yelling about who was going to clean up the mess.

The only thing hurt about me was my pride and a little embarrassment. I got up, quickly surveyed the situation, found the pack of cigarettes in the mess and jammed the sauce covered pack into my pocket. I picked up my bike. The handlebars were twisted, so I quickly got in front of the bike and put the front tire between my sauce covered knees and straightened the handlebars. Everyone was yelling- at me- because of the broken glass and mess on the sidewalk. In the distance I heard sirens and thought the police were coming after me. I got on my bike and escaped with the parts store owner chasing me. I caused a small traffic jam and a bit of neighborhood confusion.

I peddled home a little bruised, but more scared I was going to get in trouble for ruining mom's opportunity to make dinner. I was worried pop, all of my brothers, sisters, aunt Marg and a houseguest getting mad at me for not getting a chance to enjoy mom's spaghetti. Even though she used sauce in a jar as a starter it was good.

I walked into the house trying to think of what to say. Everyone was sitting in the living room and they took one look at me and the house was in an uproar of laughter because I was covered in spaghetti sauce from head to toe. Mom was the only one who didn't think it was funny. When I told her what happened and gave her the pack of

cigarettes it lessened the impact. I was sent directly to the basement to wash up in the laundry tub. Mom brought me some clothes and I got a lecture.

Later the police showed up at the door. My dad knew the officer and offered him a cup of coffee. They went out on the front porch and talked. Pop came in amused. Apparently the police officer thought I was hit by the car and knocked across the sidewalk. I was too scared to talk to the officer. Pop took care of it and they shook hands with the officer telling my dad- "I'll see you at Callahan's Mr. Mac." My dad told him he would buy him a beer. Callahan's was a tavern down the pike.

By the way, we did have spaghetti for dinner and I was the brunt of all the jokes. Particularly, Mike asking me if I wanted to wear my sauce.

Chapter Twenty Five Brothers and Sisters

Mike and I were close as kids but he had his friends and I had mine. Three years difference in age was enough to keep us going in our own directions.

My brother got this interest in the Delaware County Field and Stream. It was a rod and gun club. I don't remember the specific year but Mike was probably thirteen or fourteen and I was around eleven. He kept asking for a twenty two rifle for Christmas. It was kind of unusual to me because I didn't have a clue what a real gun was all about. Of course we had our fantasy western and army games, but a real gun?

Our older sister Marilyn kept Mike's dream alive one Christmas morning when he was surprised to find a Marlin, Mountie, twenty-two caliber, lever action rifle with a gold plated trigger under the Christmas tree. It was like a dream come true for him.

Mike used to go to the range at the field and stream. Mom would drive him out there. One day Mike took me along. The whole way he was telling me all the safety rules.

I listened intently and believe me you obeyed the rules. While Mike and I walked to the firing line mom waited in the car reading.

Mike was very careful and kept the barrel pointed at the ground with the chamber open. The range master inspected the gun to make sure it was not loaded and he looked at the ammunition.

Mike took me over to this board where the rules were and he read them to me. Mike taught me to shoot a gun that day. More importantly he taught me gun safety.

I couldn't hit the broad side of a barn. Mike on the other hand was a crack shot. He put bullet after bullet in the bull's eye. That day I learned a very important lesson that stayed with me throughout my life. It was the importance of gun safety. I learned to respect firearms and the importance of not playing with guns.

In my entire life and in my career as a policeman I never had an accident with a fire arm. You might be anti-gun. You might not be a sportsman, but I can advise you of this. Teach your children to respect firearms, the aspects of gun safety and never to play with a firearm. It is not the gun that is dangerous. It is a gun in the hands of a child or an inexperienced teenager that ultimately and nearly always ends in tragedy. You need to brainwash your children- if somebody starts playing with a gun separate yourself from the situation.

Many parents are aware of the dangers and hazards their children face growing up. Most parents lived them. The problem is parents do not teach their children. They think by not sitting them down and talking to them they might avoid the danger.

This is true with everything from playing with fire, smoking cigarettes, guns, and most important- sex education. Neil Young said it best, "teach your children well."

Chapter Twenty Six: Tex

There was a period of time where pop had a friend he met at the bar. The guy had a dog and he and the dog were living out of a car. Pop asked mom if she would rent him one of the rooms to stay in until his situation got better. Money was tight and my mother wouldn't turn her back on someone that needed help. Mom gave her nod of approval and a guy named Dave moved in. The coolest thing about it was Dave's dog Tex. I couldn't believe it. We were going to have a dog.

I had a bad experience with a beagle my sister brought home when I was three years old. This wild maniac of a beagle used to chase me around and bite me. I probably teased it, ran from it, or was generally mean to it. Whatever the case, I was just a little kid and if I was in the yard and this little beagle was outside it would chase me across the yard; I would have to climb on top of, or into the dog house and block the door in order not to get bit. Truthfully, the dog was probably tame and I was the wild one. My brother can tell you a story about the time when I was a toddler and I killed his pet kitten. That story is better left for another forum.

Tex was a different dog and is worthy of his own book. He was a larger, older, and very mellow dog. He must have been more than a couple years old. He was a mixed breed dog that looked like a hound. Tex was a Heinz fifty-seven. Tex also was a wanderer. He knew how to dodge cars so he never got hit. He also fell in love with Mike and I. That dog would follow us to the end of the earth.

Many times Mike and I walked with Tex to Naylor's Run Park. You didn't need a leash and Tex knew the way. Mike and I would walk behind him and laugh. Tex's front

legs and back legs appeared to walk in different directions. It was funny to watch him walk.

When we got to the park Tex would take off and run. He would find a rabbit or a squirrel and chase them. There were a few times where Tex got close but I don't remember him ever catching or killing anything. Sometimes we would call Tex and he would be all the way across the park. He would ignore Mike and I.

At the park once I thought Tex was lost. Mike and I searched for him all over. That crazy dog was nowhere to be found. We went home and had to explain that we lost Tex. What was funny, Dave knew better. Tex always returned home. Sometimes he was a little tired and ragged but never too much worse for wear.

Tex would follow Mike and me all over the neighborhood. He was friendly, loved people and had a personality just like we did. All Tex wanted to do was be loved, roam, and be fed when he got home. Tex's loyalty to Mike and I was sometimes an inconvenience. Once when Mike was playing for the Tigers little league team. Tex followed him to the ball field. Tex would wander across the field and lie down by Mike. If a ball went that way Tex got it first and started to run. Well Mike was thoroughly embarrassed. When little league games were being played we had to lock Tex up in the house.

Another time I was at school at St. Laurence. Somehow Tex figured out which classroom I was in. He sat next to the window and started barking. The sisters got Mike and he had to take Tex home. Of course I got into trouble and was kept after school. When I didn't show up at home on time Tex was back at St. Laurence looking for me. One thing about it Tex got me out of detention early because I had to take him home

again. There was something about the nun's not liking animals. This nun used to call Tex a filthy creature. We tried to keep Tex away from St. Laurence but sometimes he just showed up.

Chapter Twenty Seven: Trouble

Pete's older brother Ted was one superb trick artist on a bicycle. Ted had one of the first "Sting Ray" bicycles with the banana seats. Even back in the late sixties we had ramps where would try and jump over objects. Ted was good; he could jump the ramps doing wheelies, ride the handlebars, and could ride without hands on the handlebars and maneuver his bike as well as anybody with their hands on the handlebars. He could do every trick known back then. I'll tell you though, what we did on bicycles was primitive compared to what the riders do today. Of course the injuries are much more severe today and the medical care is much more advanced.

I think I nearly killed myself a half a dozen times, flying over the handlebars trying to do crazy tricks. We didn't have helmets back then and probably wouldn't have worn one anyway. If I would have had one of the modern trick bicycles I probably would have killed myself. Thank God I didn't emulate Evil Kenevil. I know I'd be dead.

The bicycle allowed us to roam farther from home and we eventually wandered into other neighborhoods. If there was a neighborhood with a lot of kids you didn't know, and you dared to ride through while they were outside playing you probably got a few rocks tossed your way. Every neighborhood had its dangers.

When I refer to the dangers of the neighborhood I ought to refer to "us." The kids when we were bored, wandered too far, got a crazy idea was the danger; particularly me.

I have to relate this story but I won't reveal which of my friends were with me. I think I'll save them the embarrassment. The one place we could go and always find trouble was Upper Darby Park and Naylor's Run creek. Remember the railroad tracks split the park. There was a contractor supply company that was serviced by the railroad.

There were about five of us walking on the tracks from State Rd. toward the park. We happened across a large empty tank partially hidden by thick brush. It was probably ten feet in diameter and fifteen feet high. It was abandoned, covered in weeds and brush. There was a two foot diameter hole in the top of the tank, and you could see there was water in the bottom.

I don't know who got the idea but we started a fire near the tank and started throwing burning boards, paper and other junk into the tank. I don't know how long it took the steam and heat from the wood to build up the pressure, but suddenly a pressure propelled column of steam and smoke billowed out of the tank's two foot hole. The pressure rocked the tank, scaring one of my buddies. He was knocked off the tank falling about fifteen feet. Actually, he fell about ten feet onto a thick thorn bush, which broke his fall, preventing him from breaking some bones. He got scratched up a little. The pressure inside the tank was building up and the noise from the steam and smoke was pretty loud. We skedaddled, running like heck, pushing past one another, tripping down a trail through the brush to the tracks getting away as fast as we could.

Need I have to say- the fire department was called to the danger we created. Fortunately, the tank didn't explode and no one was hurt.

I have to tell you something funny. When I was a very small boy visiting Jim Mahoney, his mother used to shake me down and turn my pockets inside out, because she suspected I was carrying matches. I guess I had this thing for fire.

Fortunately, in my lifetime I only had close calls with fire. The closest being the guard tower. Well I might as well get ahead of myself and tell the story. The following story is actually funny now but when I was a young private in the Army it wasn't. What if I spent my quiet time dwelling over an incident that happened when I was in the military? I was working in a detention facility at Fort Sill, Oklahoma getting ready for an Inspector General's visit. It was winter time and I was on duty working in a guard tower. I was trying to work with some Kiwi shoe polish to spit shine my combat boots. I was using a soft cotton rag stretched over my finger. I was working furiously but I just couldn't get the cracked leather to shine the way I wanted it to. It was cold and the polish was hard. I decided to melt the polish. I set the can of polish on the gas heater in the guard tower. After the polish was melted I went to pick up the shallow can by the sides and burned my fingers. I dropped the can on top of the gas space heater and the melted polish spilled down inside and caught it afire. The polish was highly flammable and the flames fiercely shot out of the heater and I panicked. The old creaky tower was made of dried out wood. I broke out the glass to the fire extinguisher cabinet with my fist, cutting my hand. I could have used the shotgun butt, broom handle, or my jacket protected elbow to break the glass to the fire extinguisher. I put out the fire, but the interior of the tower, my green starched fatigue uniform, and nearly spit shined shoes was coated with white powder. The inside of the tower smelled like a burning shoe factory. The knuckle on my right hand was cut and bleeding profusely.

I was the laughing stock of Fort Sill. The military policemen working with me didn't think it was funny when, in the midst of winter, they couldn't use the tower's heater for days. Oklahoma in the winter is cold and windy. The guard tower was freezing cold. One of the guys was brave enough to re-light the heater and finally burnt the polish off the heater coils. It's actually funny now.

One time in the fall we went a couple blocks in the other direction and were hanging out on Windsor Ave. There were a bunch of kids that were our age. Anyway, we were playing with the dead leaves that fell off the trees. Every kid brought a rake. We raked up all the leaves for half a block and piled them ten feet high building a wall clear across the street. It was hilarious. Only one guy had the nerve to drive through the pile.

Then this kid named Bart decided to be mischievous and he put a brick in the pile. One of the kids dove into the pile and was nearly knocked out. As we were dealing with the friend with a cut on the noggin this car came by. We all started running because the driver started honking his horn and started driving through the pile of leaves. The car hit the brick and the brick dented the front of the car. Its funny how fifteen kids can be rambunctiously playing and all of a sudden they all disappear without a trace.

The police came by and the next thing you know all of the kids parents that lived on Windsor Ave were supervising their kids as they cleaned up the leaves. Somehow I kind of got blamed for the brick. But, it wasn't me. This time!

Speaking of leaves piled in the street. My father used to rake up the leaves and pile them in the gutter where you burned them. I would go into the house and get a couple large russet potatoes and wrap them in tin foil. Pop would put them in the fire and continuously rake the burning leaves over the potatoes. I swear! Those were the best

potatoes you could ever eat. If you wet them while they were hot and rolled them in salt you had Murphy's. Man! They were good, particularly if you added some butter.

One of the dangers in Highland Park was the train tracks and trains that occasionally rumbled through the Park. There were three or four trestles that crossed the creek. When my friends and I were playing in the park and a train came along sometimes we would try and jump onto the back of the box car. I wasn't that adept and never made it. One of my friends made the leap and got on the back. It was crazy because more than one kid was killed by the trains in our young lifetime. This one kid, who successfully jumped on the train, got scared and couldn't jump off. Later we found out the Philly police brought him home. That was not pleasant.

Another time we were playing around on one of the trestles. There was a train in the distance. The railroad ties had a large gap in them. There was this five or six foot space. My buddy and I dared each other to climb down in the space and let the train go overhead. We were crazy enough to do it. The train was rumbling slowly across the trestle and we were crouched in the space beneath the tracks. The whole trestle shook as the train traveled overhead. The noise was incredibly loud. We were stupid sometimes because you only lose once to a train. The loss is usually fatal. This one day we didn't get hurt but, to be honest it scared the daylights out of me. I never went near a moving train after that. I think when we were telling our friends about it one of them brought up a story about a boy that was killed on State Road by the train.

If there is ever a lesson to teach you kids; unless you're a commuter or work for the railroad stay away from trains. They are dangerous and can kill you in a flash.

Chapter Twenty-Eight Boundaries

Neighborhoods in the suburbs and the city were very clannish. In the city if you were Irish and you lived in an Irish neighborhood you were not welcome to walk through an Italian neighborhood a couple blocks away. The reverse was also true. In the suburbs it was still clannish but it was different. It was not as much of segregation by your lineage but by where you lived geographically.

In our neighborhood we had families of various ethnic backgrounds; there were Italians, Greeks, Irish, Germans, Jewish, and even an Armenian. As long as you lived in the neighborhood and kind-a-sort-a fit in, you were accepted. I guess it remained that way well into the early seventies.

If you were going to play in a large group you had to have a thick skin. We used all kinds of derogatory terms and made fun of each other. As long as you didn't say something bad about somebody's mother it was kind of acceptable. Among us! We used the most derogatory terms against one another. I'd call my friend Dave a *Dego*. Dave would call me a *Mick*. The point is we were oblivious to the real pain and degradation these names can inflict.

In private our parents were very opinionated about racial and ethnic issues; but in public everybody appeared tolerant. As long as you were not black!

In the suburbs there were many different minorities, but generally they were the same general skin color. The skin color was light. Blacks were treated differently, it wasn't mere prejudice, and it was out right, blatant discrimination. As a kid I didn't know any different. So I can honestly say I had the same sociological attitudes. I grew up as bigoted as early Archie Bunker. It is not easy to admit this, and it is probably as

politically incorrect as can be to write about it. I used the “N” word referring to blacks as if it were the correct term to use. I heard it at home, at friends’ houses, and even in social gatherings.

In the late 60’s when the race riots broke out in the Watts section of Los Angeles, California my Uncle Harvey came over the house with my Uncle Charles. There was a big family pow-wow and the topic was: What happens if the riots happen in Philadelphia and gangs start coming to the suburbs? My Uncle Harvey showed my dad a pistol and they were talking all kinds of nonsense about what they were going to do to whom. They were drinking and getting all fired up. My dad was a little bit intimidated around both his brothers and pop was not the aggressive type. He was a hard worker, but when it came to being confrontational he never stood up to his older brothers. They took advantage of him for it.

Well! Mom would have no part of that. First, she didn’t like the three of them drinking together, especially in the afternoon. Second, she didn’t like Harvey and Charlie taking advantage of pop. Finally, she wasn’t going to let anybody bring a gun into her house. Man! Mom was fired up and that conversation was ended quickly. I don’t remember which bar the three of them ended up in but they quickly hit the front door.

There were no gangs of marauders that came to the suburbs. The riots in Philadelphia didn’t happen. The black population that participated in the riots across the United States was a minute percentage of the total black population.

There were no penalties in the sixties for being a racist. Many people had the same attitudes. Then again, many didn’t. In our family it was limited to pop, his older brothers and a few of their acquaintances.

When we were young, we emulated some of the language and harbored some ill feelings toward blacks and other minorities. However, we were not exposed to blacks or other minorities on a daily basis either. There wasn't a single black student in the school I attended. Blacks couldn't purchase or rent a home in most suburbs. They were forced to live in the city. My parents and others who moved to the suburbs were often referred to as the White Flight. As the older neighborhoods in Philadelphia around Larchwood Ave and Osage Ave became integrated, fearful whites moved to the suburbs.

Even the New Jersey Shore recreation areas had white and black sections. Segregation was the norm. Integration was a decade or two away. I'd prefer to keep this chapter short because I am ashamed of the way we spoke of minorities. That was the way it was.

I would like to jump ahead a few years and relate how I overcame my prejudice and bias. It was during a summer job between high school years working in a factory in Philadelphia. Hance Brother and White Pharmaceutical Company, I learned to put aside the twisted hate and personal feelings I was brought up with and learned to work with Blacks and other minorities harmoniously, in fact I worked alongside some of the finest men I ever met. They were hard working, caring, and very helpful to me. Most of them were black. The following is a true story and I didn't change the name.

I worked at Hance Brothers with a black man who was from Philadelphia. Believe it or not, his name was Leroy Jones. I was a junior in high school and I was working my summer job in the shipping and receiving department of Hance Brothers and White Pharmaceutical Company it was at 12th and Hamilton Street in downtown Philadelphia.

The company was housed in a five story red brick building occupying the entire block. It was built in the late 1800's. The inside of the building was constructed of large 18 inch square beams made of Mississippi Lob Lolly Pine. The floor was made of planks that were 12 inches wide and nearly two and a half inches thick. The planks were in two layers laid perpendicular to one another. The beams had large metal buckles around the areas that were cracked. The wood was so strong and tough you couldn't pound a nail in it. The walls were solid red brick laid in such a way to give the walls strength and were nearly a foot and a half thick. I was amazed at the construction of the building.

My dad was the local delivery driver and the owner gave me a summer job paying me minimum wage. In the event the state or federal inspectors came in I had to lie and say I was eighteen years old. I was questioned a couple times and my lie always passed muster with the inspectors.

The company had a loading dock with a freight elevator. The loading dock was originally designed to off load large horse drawn wagons with large wheels. The dock was about two or three feet higher than the back of the typical delivery truck.

The freight elevator was operated by reaching through the cut out in the wall of the wooden car. It was operated by pulling on a cable along the elevator shaft which was looped from the basement to the toggle switch on the elevator motor on the roof of the building. You pulled down on the cable on the left to go up and the cable on the right to go down. If you left your arm, hand or fingers in the square hole cut outs in the wooden elevator you would get them cut off. There was an emergency switch to stop it. The elevator was manual and you had to learn to operate the cables to get the elevator to stop exactly even with the floor.

On this particular day the local wine company was delivering a wooden cask of wine. I guess it was a little larger than a fifty-five gallon drum, maybe about seventy gallons. The wine was generic port wine used by the company to manufacture a product called Hance Brothers: *Beef Iron and Wine*, a popular elixir. Beef Iron and wine was basically a vitamin enhanced beef bouillon based broth with port wine. Supposedly it was an aphrodisiac and would help virility, and keep you young. Supposedly one took a couple tablespoons several times a day and it would keep the doctor away. Or so I was told! To be honest I think it was a throw back to the days of the carnival swindler selling the magic elixir. Beef Iron and wine was popular in the center city drug stores.

The delivery truck backed up to the loading dock of the freight elevator and I was juggling the elevator to stop it level with the granite slab of the dock. I raised the wooden barred doors and made sure the truck was backed at a good angle. I was a pretty good shipping clerk for a teenager and I earned the respect of the Teamster's Union truck drivers that picked up and delivered at the plant.

The problem with the loading dock was the two or three foot difference in height and the three feet of distance we had to move the full wine cask. We used a steel rail track that you could put grease on and stand the cask on it and slide it to the freight elevator. Then you would tilt the cask and roll it to the center of the elevator. The steel rail was secured with wooden blocks made for the job. The purpose of the grease was so the upright cask would slide easily along the rail. You would think you could tilt it on the side and roll it but wine casks don't roll. Believe me, this was a bi-weekly routine and we had it down to a science. Or so I thought!

For some reason we didn't get the rail set on the truck bed and it moved about three inches as I was sliding the cask on the rail. The wine cask slid and nearly fell off the rail, but it merely slipped between the rails tilting precariously on the brink of falling to the ground.

The alcohol tax alone on the wine in the cask was more than my weekly salary. I was a one hundred forty five pound teenager against a five hundred pound wine cask.

I called for someone to find Leroy Jones and tell him to come quick. When he arrived at the loading dock Leroy told me not to worry. He said he could put it back on the rail. We found a wooden plank and put it across the rail. Four of us were holding the plank and the rail from sliding. Leroy was six foot three, about two hundred twenty pounds, and solid muscle. He stood on the plank and squatted down hugging the wine cask. He used his legs, picked up the five hundred pound wine cask and pulled it out of the space between the rails and put it back on the rail. He slid it to the freight elevator, easily tilted it, and rolled it to the center of the elevator car to keep it balanced.

In my life I have never seen anyone lift that kind of weight with such ease. Leroy never once thought about his personal safety; he could have easily gotten hurt. I thanked him and he looked me straight in the eye and said to me. "Young Blood, you would have done the same thing for me."

That summer I gained about fifteen pounds of muscle moving freight loading and unloading trucks. On quite a few occasions I worked side by side loading trailers with Leroy; he treated me with respect and dignity. I learned about his wife and daughters and why he worked at Hance Brothers. Whether you are black or white, when you do not have an education you cannot get a high paying job. He earned my respect that summer

and my entire outlook on racial equality changed. I wish I could thank him for the influence he had on my life. I guess that was my epiphany.

You know what? I could write a book on the three summers I worked at Hance Brothers and White. I have some great stories to tell. Maybe if this memoir sells I can make it a series.

If I can give one piece of advice to every high school teenager it would be to get a summer job. Even if you don't want or need the money, the experience is worth it! Many students today go through high school and even college without learning what work ethic is. If I earned a hundred dollars a week I had to give my mother one quarter of it for room and board. Never once did I ever complain. I paid it proudly. In reality my mother and father spent ten times that on me throughout the month. Parents teach your children well or spoil them right into the grave.

Chapter Twenty Eight: Valiant

In the summertime the heat was unbearable. We didn't have air conditioning, and we didn't have any local swimming holes that weren't polluted to cool off in. When Pop had a day off on Saturday he used to take us to Ocean City, New Jersey. We made it a day trip, driving down in the morning, and coming back at night. Pop said he wanted to avoid the tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike so he took the Walt Whitman Bridge to the Black Horse Pike. About half way to Ocean City New Jersey was a tavern called the Mickey Mouse Tavern. That was one of pop's favorite watering holes on the way to the shore. It was probably the real reason we took that route.

It was around this time, I'm thinking 1965, and Uncle Harvey hit a pretty good sized bet or collected on a debt. He bought a brand new Plymouth, Valiant for a couple

thousand dollars and gave it to mom and pop to use. It was a white, two door, hard top, with a slant six engine. The car had a manual transmission with a three speed on the column. I had to laugh because my dad was proud as ever. He made the comparison of this car to the first car he ever bought a Ford; Model A. Pop was a character when he reminisced about his younger days.

As a kid I never understood why every trip to the Jersey shore was so much different than the previous one. For example, when pop was working for Yellow Cab and he made some really good tips we would be able to change in the bath house under the boardwalk by the Flanders Hotel. He might even pay the twenty five cent admission to swim in the hotel pool. That was a rare luxury. The Flanders Hotel was, and still is a flamboyant Ocean City landmark by the boardwalk on the beach at Eleventh Street. The hotel was built in 1923 and is named after the Belgium field where soldiers killed in World War I are buried. The wealthy would rent rooms for the summer and they would sit on the balconies overlooking the boardwalk and the Atlantic Ocean.

When my dad was a cab driver he had a wealthy elderly woman that was a regular fare. She would call him to take her by cab from her Philadelphia flat to the Flanders Hotel in the summer. A delivery company would meet them with her belongings. She would pay the return fare and tip my dad a hundred bucks.

When we went to Ocean City the trip was usually on a meager budget. We would park as close to the beach we could and change in the car; which was illegal even in the early sixties. We had peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in a brown bag and Kool-Aide. Even though it wasn't allowed Pop would sometimes sneak a couple cold beers to the beach. Beer was in steel cans back then and you needed a can opener to open them. Pop

always had his can or bottle opener handy. We used to joke because he referred to it as his church key.

My earliest recollection of Ocean City was from an old eight millimeter movie. I was probably a little over two and Mike was about four. My sister Marilyn had an eight millimeter wind up camera. She always took it on excursions and was a wonderful, talented photographer. Mike and I were sitting on an inflatable raft by the edge of the water. Mike was smiling and laughing. I was on the raft and an ever so slight wave pushed the raft and I got wet. I started bawling and Mike was laughing up a storm. We both had sun bleached blond hair wearing baggy bathing suits. I was quite a bit shorter than Mike and had that baby fat stomach. Mike was a bit leaner than I was. After a short while my fear of the water subsided. Mike and I then battled each other for turns on the raft.

I read a comic strip that brought something into perspective. Why do Bobby and Mike always have sore throats after going to the shore? A description of the comic will shed light on the topic.

The comic is titled *Baby Blues*, by talented artists Rick Kirkman and Jerry Scott. It is distributed by King Features Syndicate and the comic I want to mention was published on January 2, 2008 in a local paper. This particular strip reminded me of my brother and I as we were growing up. The comic strip depicts a young boy jumping on a trampoline with another boy standing nearby. The boy standing next to the jumping boy yells, "My turn!" as the other boy yells, "Not yet!" The boys are yelling it over and over. The scene repeats itself and the third box of the strip has the two tired boys sitting on a

couch, tongues hanging out, with the mother and family dog looking on. The mother exclaims, “It’s weird...Every time they play on the trampoline, they get sore throats!”

Siblings may let a plaything sit unused forever until the other is enjoying it. Suddenly there is a competition for its use. It was that way with Mike and I over those beach rental rafts. Sometimes I think my mom expended more effort playing time keeper than enjoying the sun. We used to drag the raft across the hot burning sand, running to keep from frying the bottom of our feet. We’d get the raft in the water up to our chests, wear ourselves out climbing aboard and ride a wave to the shore. More times than not, the wave would knock us both off the raft under water, and we’d end up spitting and snorting salt water out of our mouths and noses chasing the raft to shore.

When you go to the beach watch the very young toddlers and see how fast their fear of the water subsides and the waves become a playground. The less fear a child has the farther they wander from the safety and watchful eyes of adult supervision.

From my parents point of view I don’t know why Ocean City New Jersey was so much more popular than other towns. I think my dad liked it because it was not as crowded or commercialized as the larger towns. It also baffled me because he liked to drink and Ocean City was dry, and didn’t sell alcohol.

Each of my friends had their own favorite Jersey Shore. The Mahoney’s owned a house in Beach Haven on Long Beach Isle. My older sister Marge and her husband Jim always rented a house in Sea Isle.

No matter the city after a long day on the beach we enjoyed the cool ocean breeze and the excitement of walking the boardwalk. All along the board walk there were shops, penny arcades with carnival type games and rides. The boardwalk was a frenzy of

activity, lights, music, and noise. The amusement parks always had the sound of screaming children coming from them. There were shops with cotton candy, fudge, palm readers and fortune tellers. Every nook and cranny had some sort of excitement. The occasional Barker was outside calling for patrons to buy a ticket and watch a sideshow. There were miniature golf courses and all types of games to be played.

I remember my brother Mike would go to the basketball hoops. This reminded me of a carnival game. The rims were bent, the ball was over inflated, lopsided, and barely fit through the hoop, and Mike would make basket after basket, proudly walking away with the biggest available prize.

My favorite boardwalk games were the old west shooting galleries and the BB machine gun. I never won anything but I had fun. As kids we loved to ride the mini-roller coaster called the “Wild Mouse.” Pop used to discourage us by saying somebody got killed on it at one time or another. In reality, we went to the shore on a shoestring budget and Pop didn’t have any extra change to spend on wild amusement rides. It was a rare treat to have a dollar or two to spend on excesses.

There were all kinds of food concessions and restaurants on the boardwalk. I loved sweets and some of my favorites were salt water taffies and Copper Kettle Fudge. We rarely could afford the fudge but when I saved up enough money I always bought some. When mom was with us she would always spring for a piece of fudge and share it with us.

I always knew when my older sisters took a trip to the shore. There would always bring mom back a box of salt water taffies.

I learned a valuable lesson about saving money and sharing while staying with my sister Marge and my two nephews and nieces at a Jersey Shore rental in Sea Isle City. Jimmy, John and I were just old enough to walk to the boardwalk. My brother in law Jim set a limit on which street we were allowed to walk to. That was the boundary. Of course to get to the Copper Kettle Fudge store we would have to walk about fifteen blocks past the dreaded border we were not allowed to cross. Now remember, if you told me not to do something it was in my nature to push the limits.

I had saved seven dollars and I had that craving for Copper Kettle Fudge. Of course it meant walking to the boardwalk and strolling the additional outlawed distance. I conned my nephews Jim and John to go with me. Yes! We were disobeying the strict instructions not to walk too far. My disobedience was defiance. Jim and John were just tagging along.

Why I pushed the limits I don't know because I was fortunate I was invited along and allowed to spend the week with them. It was a Saturday, we just got to the shore, and Marge and Jim were getting the house situated.

The journey to the Copper Kettle took about an hour longer than it should have. We were a mile farther from the house than we should have been and I was the leader of the expedition. It was cool standing outside watching the candy makers' mix the fudge in the large copper kettles. I went in and spent nearly all of my money buying a pound of chocolate and vanilla fudge. It was stacked and boxed neatly, wrapped in wax paper. I paid for it and it was placed in a Copper Kettle Fudge bag.

Of course the address of the store was on both the box and the bag. Jim, John and I each ate a couple pieces of the rich, creamy fudge as we walked back to the house.

We were intercepted by big Jim, the name I always called my brother in law, who was driving around looking for us. Needless to say, I was in trouble for conning the other two and journeying too far from the house. I tried to lie about the distance but the address on the box of fudge was a dead giveaway.

Jim was a strict disciplinarian and was a screamer. He yelled at me until I had tears in my eyes. We got back to the shore house and Jim sat me down at the table. I guess I was about nine or ten years old. Jimmy was around eight and John was seven. Their younger sister Cathy was still at the shore house because we ditched her earlier. We snuck away and left her behind. I'm sure she knew our plan and snitched on us. Marge's two other boys Kevin and Michael were too young to notice. I think Mike was still in diapers.

My creamy rich prize in the box was confiscated and put on top of the refrigerator. I was in no uncertain terms going to touch it until after dinner. Then, after dinner, Big Jim gave me the fudge and had me share the fudge with everyone in the house. I also had to offer a piece of fudge to anybody else that came over. My punishment was complete when the fudge was gone. I only had two pieces out of the whole box. Now I was nearly broke having spent my whole savings the first day at the shore. I really didn't have much of a craving for fudge on this trip after that episode. Jim made it a point to know the lesson here. It was, you will share with the family and you will listen when I tell you how far you are allowed to go.

We would all get up real early the next morning to go to the beach, which was only about three or four blocks away. There was a lot of preparation. We had to make the peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. The drink of choice was Kool-Aide and we had to fill

up the empty milk jugs. We made extra ice the night before. There we were five fair skinned, blond headed kids, gathering up and carrying chairs, a cooler, towels, sand buckets with shovels, beach bags and all the accessories necessary for a long day at the beach. Marge had Mike in a stroller. We must have been funny looking. The bathing suits we wore back then were usually checkered or plaid and were baggy. Mine were hand me downs so they were a little too big for me. The string around the waist was tied snugly and held them up. We wore a T-shirt and all had different colored flip flops. Jim, John and I had these funky looking white plastic safari hats. We wore them like we were going on the great expedition.

One of the things rambunctious kids going to the beach for the first time in the summer rarely do is wear sun tan oil. The sunscreens of today weren't perfected yet. Occasionally we would be summoned to put some oil on our backs. Jimmy really was the fairest of all of us. John and Cathy were a little darker and usually tanned. Not Jim and I! By noon we were getting red and by the after noon we were burnt to a crisp. My back and ears were usually the worst. We had a great time at the beach. We built sand castles and dug ditches. We teased each other, splashed, and played.

Marge and Jim went to the beach with six children and came back to the house with crispy critters, redder than a lobster, and whining in pain from the sunburn. That first night was unbearable. All of us except John were sunburned. John had a darker complexion and always tanned.

The good times at Sea Isle City were not marred by the restrictions of going to the beach. You would not believe the restrictive rules posted on the multitude of signs on the path through the sand dunes. There were signs that prohibited ball playing, surfing, fires,

fishing, walking in the sand dunes, pets, alcohol, glass, rafts- except the ones you could rent, bicycles, and a number of other goofy city ordinances. The bans would be complete if you outlawed swimming.

Jimmy, John, and I, except for the unauthorized trip to the Copper Kettle, generally stayed within the boundary of how far we could go. There was this penny arcade on the boardwalk not more than a half a dozen blocks from the house. We used to walk there and play nickel games of pin ball, skill ball, and some the other games. Video games weren't invented yet.

Marge and Jim truly were good to me by including me in many of their family adventures and trips. Many times Marge would take my older brother Mike along with us. What was funny is wherever we went people assumed Mike and I were Marge and Jim's children also.

Marge had six children all together and with Mike and I in tow there were eight. You should have seen the look on peoples faces when we all went to Sixty-Ninth Street and walked through Gimble's department store. The way people looked at the tribe walking through the store you would have thought the circus was in town.

My sister was inspirational when it came to being patient carting a tribe of kids around. Later in life it took its toll, but as I remember the early years, it was a blast when we all got together and went somewhere.

There is something about family most people take for granted. The worst thing a person can do in life is get estranged from family. I used to hate it when big Jim would yell at me or hit me. He would make you feel about ten inches tall. His form of discipline

was borderline abuse. Did I ever let it bother me or have a long term affect? No! I never did and I never held a grudge against Jim.

Years later Jim was dying from cancer. I called him on the phone. He was literally on his death bed. We had a very pleasant conversation; I actually thanked him for being so tough on me when I was a kid. I told him I thought it made me a stronger, tougher person. He did say something that hit close to heart. He reminded me about how I always cared about people. He said “Bobby, of all the people in the family you, among them all, cared the most about other people.” I’m still struggling with that today. Do I truly care enough about family? Am I doing enough?

Chapter Twenty Nine: Valiant part II

It seems tragedy always follows a good deed and vice versa. My older brother Brad was in his late teens and had a driver’s license. He borrowed the Valiant to run an errand. It was a rainy day in the fall and the leaves from the trees were on the ground. Brad was driving, going down a wet, leaf covered hill and tried to stop at a stop sign. He slid across Cedar Lane into a dirt embankment. The car had a dented fender and Brad was quite apologetic and upset. Not nearly as upset as pop! Mom on the other hand was mad but she understood- accidents happened.

Uncle Harvey loved Brad and had these expectations that he was one day going to play college baseball and be a professional baseball player, like himself. That alone was absolution for any wrong doing by Brad. Uncle Harvey, after all, had bought insurance on the car and within a couple weeks it was like new.

The Valiant was something else. When Mom drove it she would wind the engine until it sounded like it was redlined before she changed gears. That car had a slant six

engine that was bullet proof. The car didn't have any optional equipment. It had an AM radio and a cigarette lighter. My parents were very grateful just having a car to drive. My mother hated that she was beholden to Uncle Harvey because of how she perceived the way he treated pop.

Brad borrowed the Valiant one Saturday and was going to the shore with a couple of friends. I was dragged along. Brad must have been seventeen or eighteen. There were a group of us in the car and we headed to the shore. The valiant was a reliable car and it was a hot summer day.

They rented a small motor boat and fishing gear. The owner of the boat got mad when one of Brad's friends tried to sneak a cooler of beer on the boat. He put the stop to that and threatened to have them arrested. The cooler stayed in the trunk of the car. We were puttering around the bay trying to catch some fish. I was not very experienced at catching fish but I caught this pretty good sized flounder and it took me a while to get it landed. Brad and his friends were astonished because I was least experienced fisherman, and I was also the only one who caught a fish. Brad was a good sport about taking me places. His friends probably minded, because I was a pest but they treated me like I was their brother too.

They did get to enjoy their beer but not on the boat like they planned. My brother and his friends were always pretty responsible. To this day my brother has an annual reunion at the fire house in Highland Park. His friends still keep in touch fifty years later. I think family and friends should be that way. I have never met a more loyal person than my brother Brad. He was always loyal to his friends, remains dedicated and loyal to family, the church, his business, and the United States Marine Corps.

The first wedding I attended was my sister Marge's; I was only about a year and a half old. The next family wedding was my sister Florence. She was affectionately named Flossie. She had some tough luck as a kid catching a bad bout of Ringworm. She had a shaved head for a couple months and everybody made fun of her. My sister Marilyn had an eight millimeter movie camera and there were some pretty embarrassing movies in the collection of Flossie in pajamas and a shaved head. She was always a good sport about it when movies were shown.

Flossie married a guy named Bill Lott. Bill was a very tall thin guy with dark handsome looks. I remember Bill was always at the family picnics and parties. When Bill and Flossie got married it was a blast. I was just a little kid and we were running around sneaking grape Ne-Hi Sodas from behind the bar. I got so sick. Marilyn managed to get some nice footage of the wedding.

My sister Marilyn was a very special person. When she was a child she got Rheumatic Fever. It caused a very serious debilitating heart condition called Rheumatic Heart. She never let the heart disease slow her down. As long as I can remember she worked for a doctor as a nurse. I wasn't close to Marilyn as a toddler or as a very young boy, but when I grew to my pre-teen and teenage years Marilyn would become my mentor.

I briefly mentioned some of this earlier but I'll repeat it. I never knew much about their teenage years but I know Marge, Marilyn, Flossie, and their friends were frequent attendees of Dick Clark's *American Bandstand*. They were sometimes on television dancing on the crowded dance floor.

Of the three girls, my sister Mary, we called her Betsy, was probably closest to me when I was a toddler. I guess it was because she was closer in age and was the most interested in playing surrogate parent to me when I was a baby. My impression today is she really didn't spend a lot of time socializing with Marge, Flossie, and Marilyn.

Betsy was very much a hypochondriac. If there was an illness and or a medicine for it she contracted the illness and convinced a doctor she needed a prescription for it. When I was a child I was very fond of Betsy. I didn't see her darker side and was never the victim of one of her mood swings. Not until I was grown.

I kind of blame the pharmacist from the Highland Park Apothecary for enabling her addiction to prescription drugs. I never knew it but when she was in High School Betsy was drinking cough syrup with codeine like it was soda pop. Betsy was always working for or volunteering for the nuns at the convent. She was very popular with them and she was a very devout person in her own mind. My sister loved me and she was always looking after me when I was a little boy.

When Betsy fell in love with a really wonderful guy named Joe Feldman she told my parents she wanted to get married. Joe lived in the smallest town in Pennsylvania. A Borough called Millbourne. It was nestled between Upper Darby, and the City of Philadelphia. Joe worked for a factory in Philly and was a volunteer fireman in Millbourne. Most of the suburban fire departments were staffed by volunteers, as was the one we lived next to.

As tradition dictates, Joe asked my fathers permission to marry her. Joe and pop went to the bar and pop, of course, gave the marriage his blessing. My mother on the other hand was candid with Joe and warned him about Betsy's "issues." And if I recall

correctly mom warned him not to marry her. Joe being the fine gentleman he was followed through with his promise to Betsy and married her. Their marriage was not without difficulties because Betsy was always physically or mentally ill.

Betsy was the finest cook. When we went to their house for dinner she prepared some of the finest food. I remember eating a Christmas dinner she cooked. The roast beef was the tastiest and the meat melted in your mouth. My mother and father were on edge because of some of the troubles she had. I was too young to notice. Betsy and Joe had a daughter, Joan. She was a wonderful child and really kept Betsy busy. Joe was so proud of Joan. He was a very good father and endured Betsy's episodes of illness.

I really feel bad today because Betsy is deceased, and during the last fifteen years of her life I had no contact with her. Betsy had a beautiful, caring daughter, Joan, who was killed in a car accident when she was sixteen years old. After the accident Betsy kind of went off the deep end, her addictions got worse and her mental illness was out of control. If I or anyone else in the family were to reach out to help her she would get vindictive and retaliate. It was really hard to believe she was the same person I knew as a child.

When Betsy died I was unable to attend her funeral. I truly cannot understand why it didn't affect me emotionally when she died. I was so cold and callous when I heard about her death. I am ashamed today.

I wish I could go back in time and stop her from drinking that cough medicine when she was a teenager.

If you are a parent and discover your child is experimenting with alcohol or drugs don't accept it as just growing up. Stop it immediately. Get involved, intervene. Do not

accept the behavior and nip it in the bud. Do it immediately and quickly before you have a bigger problem on your hands.

I cannot tell you how many teenagers who try hard drugs for the first time end up in a psychotic episode where the drug triggers a permanent mental illness. Even the marijuana grown today is much stronger than in the seventies. The methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin of today is so strong and pure it can kill with a single use. When a teenager gets addicted to these drugs it is almost impossible to get them off it; particularly when crack cocaine or methamphetamines in the form of ice are the addicting drugs.

Chapter Thirty: Family Stories

When I went to weddings I was a dancing fool. It didn't matter who my dancing partner was. I saw some home movies when I was at my sister Flossie's wedding. I was wearing a gray tweed suit, white shirt, and had funny looking Stacie Adams, spat style shoes. I had these short legs and squatty body with white sun bleached blond hair. I was all of about five years old and was dancing up a storm. I had some pretty good moves on the dance floor for a tyke.

At the reception Pop created a scene by turning off the taps on the keg of beer. He thought everybody was drinking too much. He wasn't worried about the inebriation level of the guests. He wanted to take the keg home and put it in the basement for himself. When Pop drank too much he got some wild ideas. Flossie's husband Bill handled the situation well and Pop was put in his place.

They bought a row home in Drexel Hill and still live there today. I have to tell you a funny story about that house. There was only one bathroom on the second floor. I

hadn't been over the house in years. Pop and I were visiting from Texas. Right by the front door was a closet and a stairway leading to the second floor. We were visiting and Pop, Bill, and I were drinking beer in the living room. Pop got up and said he had to go to the bathroom. He walked over to the stairs and instead of going upstairs he opens the closet door and walks in. Well I said something to Bill about Pop going into the closet and he started laughing. Bill says, "Bobby, you didn't know we put a bathroom in there did you?" I said, "No, I thought it was still a closet and assumed pop was drunk." Here all this time I was going upstairs to take a leak. In the last forty five years that bathroom was the only improvements done to the house until their children, Billy, Barb, and Chris got together and put in a new kitchen. Flossie and Bill have been married for almost fifty years. He really takes good care of Flossie. But I don't know how she can stand going up and down the stairs of that house. I swore I'd never buy a two story house. I hate stairs.

I'm not mentioning this to embarrass anyone or make light of Flossie and Bill. What this lesson refers to is the comfort zone.

Life seems to roll along fine when you are in your comfort zone. Some people do not like to rearrange the furniture, change the décor or even the old curtains because they get used to the way things are.

When people get in a comfort zone they don't change jobs, will turn down promotions, will avoid risk taking, and sometimes will spend more money fixing something that's broken before they buy another one.

My sister and brother in law are in their comfort zone and have been for almost fifty years. To be honest with you I'm envious of that.

People who have aspirations for improvement in their careers, promotions, more education, and or wealth generally function better when they are outside of their comfort zone. Some people thrive on competition and pressure. The economic engine of this great nation runs better when the movers and shakers are outside of their comfort zone and are investing in the venture of the economy.

When there is a recession you see corporate America taking less risk. There will be less innovation and less invention. I'm not an economist but I'll bet I'm right. Don't stay in your comfort zone. I really think everybody should take a chance and aspire for greatness. Let's say your fifty years old and regret not having a college degree then go back to school. If you don't like your job, put together your resume and find a better one. If you are over weight and out of shape, start exercising. It is never too late. Let me jump ahead, in 2009 I finished my bachelor's degree, and took a Chief of Police Job in a town called Uvalde, Texas. I retired from the Corpus Christi Police Department after 30 years on May 31, 2010 and took the job in Uvalde on June 1, 2010. Talk about getting out of your comfort zone. Although it sounds like I didn't have any time off I was out on medical leave for rotator cuff surgery so I had a few weeks off.

Chapter Thirty One: Moving

Going back to where I was. It wasn't long after my sister Betsy's wedding that the worst news of my life happened. My parents were given notice that they had to move from Park Ave. I think it was about 1965. The owners were selling the house. I remember a brief, and I mean very brief conversation about them buying the house. The asking price was about twenty thousand dollars. My parents couldn't afford it.

Remember that my mother always put the interest of the family and children first. Mom and pop shopped around and they found an apartment on West Chester Pike within walking distance of St. Laurence School. The apartment was actually a single family home divided into three apartments. There were two small one bedroom apartments on the first floor and a three bedroom apartment on the second floor. The front of the building had a store front occupied by a carpet store. Mom and pop rented the second story apartment and we made preparations to move in.

It was a sad day moving from Park Avenue to the Apartment on West Chester Pike. Three of my sisters were married at this point so it would be my parents, Brad, Mike, and my sister Marilyn moving in. I rarely saw Brad. He was always involved in some sport, coaching, school, and church. He was in or about to go in the Catholic Seminary after he graduated from High School and wasn't around much.

The packing and preparing for the move was hectic. A lot of junk was thrown out. I never knew how many useless, broken toys I had accumulated and never played with or paid attention to. That is, until it was time to throw them out. It's amazing how important useless junk becomes when you threaten to throw it out.

My parents saved or borrowed enough money to hire a discount moving company to move our furniture and packed belongings to the other apartment. The apartment on the corner of Cedar Lane and Westchester Pike was actually not more than a block away from the house on Park Ave.

The funniest part of the move was the argument about how the movers wanted more money to move the pool table from the basement. Pop was so mad. He thought they were racketeers trying to rip him off.

We didn't know anybody with a truck. Brad in his infinite wisdom convinced mom and pop they could carry the pool table a block. Now let's be realistic. Brad and his friends couldn't possibly carry an eight foot pool table with a one inch thick slate from Park Ave to Cedar Lane. But these guys had to try it anyway.

Instead of carrying the pool table one of Brads friends suggested they put one end in the truck of the Plymouth Valiant and they would hold up the other end and walk behind the car. Try and tell a bunch of teenagers it wouldn't work. No way! These guys were determined.

I don't remember who was driving the car but there were six of Brad's friends holding up their end. The car was chugging along with them in tow, holding a pool table that was precariously balanced, protruding out of the trunk of the car. This was the most hilarious sight. They got to the end of the street, around the corner when, whoever was driving popped the clutch and the car jumped forward. The boys dropped the pool table onto the surface of the road. The result was the slate cracked right across the middle.

There would never be another game of pool played on that table. Actually, I give Brad and his friends an "A" for effort.

It took a couple days but we got moved in and settled. I do have to bring up Tex, the borrowed dog. It was sometime before we moved Dave Blank had to get his own accommodations. He let us keep his dog for a while. When Dave did take Tex to his place Tex ran away and came back to us. I think this happened at least twice before Dave gave up and let us borrow Tex for a while.

One of the funerals that hit me the hardest when I was a young kid was Uncle Harvey. He died in 1965 at the age of sixty-five. He was alone in bed in the motel room

he was living in. In reality he must have been a lonely man. I think he put on an air that he was a big shot. I was too young to know what he was really like. He was kind to me after all he taught me the finer points of playing pool and cheating at cards.

Pop really took Harvey's death hard. When he heard of his death he started crying and drinking hard. I never saw my father cry until that day. I was being a little bit of a pest and he gave me a quarter to get out of his hair.

I went down the street to play in a vacant lot with trees. I was climbing a tree and fell. I hit the ground and passed out. I had another one of those episodes.

I awoke, alone in the lot, and was scared I hurt myself. I was dazed and a little dizzy. I looked around and didn't see anybody around. I got up off the ground, brushed myself off, and walked to the Highland Park Apothecary and bought some M & M's.

I didn't attend the funeral but there was one heck of a party afterward. Pop got slammed drinking beer and whiskey. Mom got mad but she understood why Pop got so drunk. This was one of those times for pop to let it go.

In our family it seems the only time people really got together were funerals and weddings.

Chapter Thirty Two: Marilyn

I really haven't spent much time talking about my sister Marilyn. She was an inspiration and tough as nails. Marilyn was the most stubborn person I ever met, other than myself. When I was little and Marilyn was living at home she had this weird schedule. She would go to work early in the morning opening up the doctor's office and

then would come home about eleven. Then she would go to work late in the afternoon and work until about nine at night.

When she was home on her break you didn't bother her. She was watching her favorite soap operas and taking a nap. Marilyn was in very poor health. Remember as I mentioned earlier as a teenager she contracted Rheumatic Fever and ended up with rheumatic heart disease. The doctors told her to take it easy and not push herself. If ever anyone needed to be in a comfort zone it was Marilyn. However she was just the opposite. Marilyn was a risk taker and very adventurous.

She liked to travel and she documented her travels on eight millimeter film. I remember she visited a movie set in the Bahamas; it was a James Bond Film, *Thunderball* starring Sean Connery. He was one of her favorite actors and she even got to meet him for an instant.

Marilyn loved to ski and hit the slopes every winter. Even though she was acting against the doctors orders she did it anyway. She took flight lessons and almost skydived. Those adventures were the only thing she didn't finish. Actually, Marilyn was too smart to jump out of a perfectly good airplane.

One of the most inspirational stories I have about Marilyn was when Mike broke his arm playing basketball. His arm was in a cast and he wasn't allowed to hit the court. He was miserable. Mike was a very good basketball player and could hold his own against kids two and three years older than him. Mike was hanging around the house and Marilyn went and got his basketball and told him to go play basketball. She didn't want him to tell Mom or Pop though. Mike was the terror of the court with that cast on. He would go for a drive and the plaster covered elbow led the way.

After he got the cast off he and his friends were playing basketball at the Observatory playground, next to St. Laurence School. Some great basketball players visited those courts in the sixties and seventies. Mike and his friends came home one Saturday complaining that some older kids kicked them off the court. Marilyn was home resting as she often worked on Saturdays. She got mad at the boys pouting. Marilyn rounded them up and gave them a motivational speech about winning and not taking any crap off the older kids. She told Mike and his friends to go challenge them to a game of full court and beat the pants off of them.

They rounded up a few more players and Mike and his friends went back to the Observatory and challenged the older kids. They played some pretty rough basketball and the fouls were being ignored as fair play. Mike and his friends won the basketball game and the court back from the older kids. Mike and his friends gained a lot of respect that day and the inspirational talk from Marilyn helped. She had that effect on you.

Marilyn wouldn't stand for any of us hanging around the house in the afternoon. She wanted quiet to rest and to watch her soap operas. There were many hot days in the summer where we were relegated to the outdoors in the heat until Marilyn went back to work.

Mike would be playing basketball and I would sometimes tag along. Being the shortest kid didn't help me get playing time. Not that height mattered it was my lack of ball handling ability that kept me from getting picked for a team.

One of Mike's friends was on the court shooting baskets and he bet me he could make twenty five foul shots in a row. I had to stand under the basket and rebound for him. His name was Mike also, and he lived on Madison Ave. He was a very good shot

and a great ball handler. I stood under the basket and rebounded for him. He didn't miss a single foul shot and he made over one hundred without a miss. I was so tired and sore throwing the ball back to him.

I kind of hesitate talking about my brothers friends because in their own right, each one of them deserves their own autobiography.

Chapter Thirty Three: Basketball

I wasn't in the league of talent my brother Mike was in when it came to sports, especially basketball. However my friends and I we used to have some fierce competitions in the driveway of our friend Dave's house.

My friend Dave Recchiuti and his younger brother Mike lived on the corner of Madison Ave. and Park Ave. They also had a little sister. Dave's father owned and worked a grocery store on West Chester Pike in Kirklynn, just west of Highland Park. Dave's father was of Italian decent. He was a very hard working man running this neighborhood grocery store that was open from early in the morning until late in the evening six days a week. In the sixties Pennsylvania had "Blue Laws" which prohibited businesses from being open on Sunday.

Anyway, Dave's house had a two car garage with a flat asphalt driveway. There was a basketball hoop attached to the roof of the garage. A chain link fence bordered the driveway on either side. It was probably the most played basketball court in the neighborhood. Of course his mom or dad had to move the family car and park it in the front of the house on Madison in order for us to play.

Pete, Jim, Dave, and I had hundreds of two and two basketball games on that court. Of the four of us I thought I was the greatest basketball player ever. In reality I probably ranked third out of the four of us. I won't mention who was fourth because I value the friendship of Pete and Jim.

The games were often physical with the four of us throwing the occasional elbow and maybe even the not so unusual shoving match. We would play all kinds of games. I was pretty good at Twenty One particularly from the foul line. Jim was good at Horse. He could make shots from all kinds of places on the court. Dave could play, and beat you at one on one because he was strong, and could muscle you from under the basket. Pete on the other hand, was good at Thirty One when it was one against three. Pete was quick, determined and a little taller so he could get points off of rebounds.

We were very competitive against one another. The games were fun and as kids we stayed fit.

Dave, even as a young kid, was a worker and was involved in a lot of activities at home, school, working for his dad, and at his church. Thinking back, I think Dave was the only Italian kid I knew that wasn't Catholic. He seemed like he was always involved in something. His parents recognized that keeping a kid busy was one of the secrets to keeping a boy out of trouble. How true it was then and even more so today.

The more structured activities you keep your children involved in the less likely they are to get into trouble.

One day we were playing basketball in Dave's driveway. It was Jim and Dave against Pete and me. The game was tight and we kept trading baskets. Jim would score on me, Pete would score on Dave. It seemed every shot that was thrown up went in. Back

and forth we scored with neither side getting a clear advantage over the other. The funniest thing happened. The game was tied and I took a shot, I missed and the ball took a weird bounce off the rim and landed on top of the chain link fence. The ball was punctured by the sharp barb of the fencing. It made a loud pop and a hissing sound. It stayed there impaled on the wire. The four of us looked at one another and realized the game was over. None of us had another basketball. With the game tied we walked off the court laughing. I forgot whose basketball got ruined. They were expensive and were hard to come by. I will say this there was never a repeat of that basketball game.

Dave's brother Mike is another example of a regular kid that grew up and accomplished his dream. Mike is one of the most successful confectioners in America. He owns Recchiuti, San Francisco. It is a fashionable confectionary in the Ferry Building in San Francisco. He also co-authored a book, *Chocolate Obsession*. You can visit his website at Recchiuti.com.

Some of the luxuries I enjoyed were because of the generous nature of my sister Marilyn. Even though she had heart disease she worked long hours in a split day as a nurse. Over the years Marilyn had taken some of the family on a road trip out west. A few years later when I was old enough she took Mike and I on a similar trip. We saw many historic sights. We went as far west as the Meteor Crater, Painted Desert, Petrified Forests, and north to Yellowstone National Park, Mount Rushmore, and the Badlands. That was a very memorable trip and I remember many of the minute details today.

She took mom, Mike and I to Canada. There were also many other weekend trips to the shore. Marilyn was very generous but could be obstinate and stubborn.

Marilyn got into regular arguments with pop. One of them was the stupidest I can remember. Marilyn saved up and bought a Magnavox console television with a built in stereo and radio. It was one of the first remote controlled televisions. She put it in the living room. One afternoon she got into an argument with pop over something she wanted to watch versus something he wanted to watch.

She got mad and she moved the television into her bedroom. I think that lasted a couple weeks before she put it back in the living room to keep the peace. The reality of it was Marilyn didn't like pop's drinking. That was probably the root of most of the arguments she had with pop.

Marilyn eventually met Frank Clark and got married. Marilyn was not supposed to have any children but she wanted a baby. According to her doctor her heart was not strong enough. Her rheumatic heart disease was worsening. Marilyn was stubborn and got what she wanted; and she wanted a baby so she became pregnant. She had a difficult pregnancy; but had a healthy baby girl Melissa. Marilyn became ill shortly after the pregnancy. Melissa was a wonderful healthy baby. They lived in Chicago where Frank worked. Because she was getting weaker as was her relationship with Frank, Marilyn and the baby came to live with us.

Her doctors recommended surgery to repair her heart. Marilyn was courageous and didn't flinch at the thought of heart surgery, even in the early seventies when the procedures were primitive in comparison to today.

The surgery didn't go well and she was gravely ill. I went to see her after the surgery and I was in shock from seeing all the tubes, bandages and the breathing machine. I couldn't bear being in the room and with Marilyn beckoning me to come

closer with her hand, I froze, I left the room crying. My sister Marilyn died a few days later. This was a very sad day for everyone. I couldn't bear it and to this day remember that time as one of the saddest in my life.

Fortunately Flossie and Bill took in Melissa and raised her as if she was their own daughter. That is a longer story than I have time for. One day when Melissa was in kindergarten or first grade Frank came to town and took Melissa away.

Years later after my parents and I moved to Texas she tracked Frank down and was able to convince him to let Melissa live with them. She kept Melissa through High School and my brother Brad and his dear wife Shirley helped continue to raise Melissa through college. There is a lot more to this story but I think it is better told by someone else.

I missed Marilyn dearly and it took years for me to get over her death. As time does, it eventually healed this deep wound.

Chapter Thirty Four: Sports VS Adventure

Whenever I went up to the Observatory playground to play basketball I was always the last person to get picked for a pick up game. I just wasn't that good a ball player. I enjoyed the game and it didn't bother me that I was picked just to even out the sides. I tried my hardest and sometimes I could actually score or make a good pass. Rebounding, that was another matter. I couldn't out jump my shoelaces.

One of the less memorable sports stories I can tell you was when my older brother Brad was coaching a little league hardball team at West View playground. West View

was the next neighborhood over from ours. Brad was a very good ball player and was respected by all the other kids in the neighborhood. He kind of twisted my arm and made me go to one of the practices and wanted me to play. The problem was Brad didn't know how bad I was. Well, the only position I ever played in the soft ball league I was in was right field, or short field. This time Brad puts me at second base. After a missed catch and a couple throwing errors it took all of about fifteen minutes for the rest of the kids to realize I was no second baseman. It kind of embarrassed Brad and he had to take me off the field. Later one of the kids came up to me and told me he was going to beat the crap out of me if I came back. Actually, I didn't want to be there in the first place. One, I've never played hardball before. Two, I was a really bad baseball player. My hardball career ended that day.

My brother never mentioned that day to me. He was glad I didn't go back to play and I guess he knew I wasn't ever going to be a ball player. Brad meant well and really had my best interest at heart. If he would have taken me back to the field the team probably would've fired him as coach.

I really didn't like organized sports as much as my brothers. Organized sports meant you had to go to practice, attend the scheduled games and stay committed throughout the season. That just wasn't me. I liked my freedom too much.

I was about twelve or thirteen years old when I took an interest in fishing. There was no place in Upper Darby to fish. There were a couple spots along Darby Creek toward Clifton and a couple spots on a creek called French Creek. The one place you could go fishing was a lake called Springton Reservoir. There were no piers or boats allowed. There were a couple bridges you could fish near and toss your lines under the

bridge. The lake had a variety of fish but the most abundant sport fish were crappie, carp and bass. Another good fishing spot was Ridley Creek in Ridley State Park. That was even farther out and was harder to get to. The state fisheries used to stock Ridley with small trout.

Being a kid and getting to Springton meant taking a bus or trolley out West Chester Pike to Route 252 and hitchhiking to the damn. Then we would walk along some trails to some of our favorite fishing spots. Sometimes my mother or father would drive us out to the lake and drop us off and we would fish all day. Then they would pick us up at a predetermined time and location.

Springton was a large impounded body of water that was the drinking supply for many of the suburbs west of Philadelphia. The water was quite good because they used charcoal filters to get the nasty chlorine taste out of the water. In contrast, we used to joke about the Philadelphia drinking water. "You could always tell when you were in Philly's city limits the water tasted nasty."

The night before I went fishing I would get the garden hose and wet down a spot in the back yard. I used to wait about two or three hours after dark; with a flashlight in hand I'd be on my hands and knees searching for large worms called night crawlers. They were fun to catch. You could put about a dozen in some potting soil in a coffee can and the worms would be alive in the morning when you went fishing.

One day Pete and I planned to go out to Springton. We took the bus out the Pike and got off at Rt. 252 to Newtown Rd. We hitchhiked on Rt. 252 with our tackle boxes and fishing poles toward the dam. Newtown rd. intersected Bishops Hollow Road where a bridge crossed a narrow section of the lake. There was another bridge farther from the

damn in shallower water called the Gradyville Road Bridge. We finally got a ride and were picked up by this very old man in a jeep. He was going fishing also and he gave us a ride to the Gradyville Road Bridge where we liked to fish. We fished all day hiking up and down the trails. We had all kinds of bait. We had dough balls for carp, fish eggs and worms for crappie, and lures for bass. We fished for hours walking from spot to spot; we tried everything and couldn't catch a fish.

We thought we were Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer. We got this wild idea to walk along the trails to the head waters or source stream of the lake. The lake narrowed and the trails got narrower. We walked and walked for what seemed like hours. The farther up the trail we walked the narrower it got. We had to find large sticks to beat back the brush and sticker bushes to make a trail. We were persistent and daring. It was a hot muggy day and there was no breeze. We had to walk through small swampy mud puddles. We wore Chuck Taylor Converse sneakers back then and both our feet were wet and covered in mud. We kept beating back the brush as if we were on a safari in the jungle.

We had no idea where we were heading. Finally, I heard traffic in the distance. I said to Pete, "Do you hear that?" Pete said sarcastically, "Hear what, I'm deaf remember?" I told Pete I heard cars. Here we were in what seemed like an impenetrable jungle. We were walking on a trail that no longer resembled a trail and we were, for all intent and purpose, lost.

Pete didn't believe I could hear cars. I told him I definitely heard traffic coming from the distance in the direction we were walking. We were hot, sweaty, and tired. We had already eaten our snacks and drank the cooler of Kool-Aid we brought and we were

starting to think about turning back and walking another couple hours back to the bridge crossing Gradyville road.

Pete and I continued slashing our way through the brush and thorny thicket. We had a couple close calls with some snakes but they seemed like they were more scared of us than we were of them. If they only knew! We came upon another trail that was traveled quite a bit. We continued walking toward the sound of cars and in the distance when we saw a highway. It was the Pike; but we were miles farther west than where we needed to be to catch the bus.

We started walking while hitchhiking on the side of the road along the Pike. We were wet and muddy; nobody in their right mind would give us a ride. We were walking east on the Pike wearily toting our fishing gear hitchhiking when a jeep pulled up and the driver honked his horn. It was the old black gentlemen in the jeep that gave us a ride earlier. He was smiling and showed us a large steel tub of water in the back of the jeep. There were two large carp swishing around in the tub. He was telling us how he caught them. He also had a couple catfish in a creel he had. We told him how we were skunked and didn't even get a nibble.

He was perplexed at where he saw us and asked how we got out on West Chester Pike. We told him of our journey from the bridge to the Pike. He was astounded that we walked all that way on a path through the brush. He said he had been fishing all along the reservoir and Ridley State Park and never heard of anyone walking from Springton to the Pike along the trails. Come to think of it. I told that story several times over the years and no one believed we did it.

I knew of friends that would take a trip to the lake and swim. It was illegal to boat or swim in Springton and the park rangers would chase them away. I was yelled at a few times for swimming where we weren't supposed to. Many times when we went out to the lake and went swimming some of my friends would dare each other to swim across. I knew better. I could swim but I was not that good a swimmer to make it all the way across. There were several instances where kids drowned trying to make that swim.

One of the teenagers who lived on Madison Avenue died years later trying to make that swim. He was a great kid and a pretty good basketball player. He was a few years younger than me and was small in stature and his nickname was Termite. I think his name was Mark.

Back in the late sixties and early seventies the area around Springton Lake was not as developed as it is today. There were very few homes on the shoreline and there were a lot of trails to fish from. Today there are beautiful large homes all along the shoreline and I'm sure access too much of the lake is restricted.

One of the things you need to make your children understand as they grow up is to know their limitations. It is also a pretty good idea not to let others goad them into dangerous behavior. Every child has an ego. More times than not a child will accept a dare because of the challenge particularly, if they let their ego get the better of them.

Teach your children to recognize their limitations and not put themselves in a position where they might get hurt or killed.

I once did something really stupid. I loved to fish and the weather didn't matter. My parents were out of town for the weekend. It was cold and I read in the paper that the

reservoir was frozen over. The temperature had been in the teens for weeks. The winter was a dry one with little snow.

I gathered my fishing gear and a small ax and was going to go ice fishing. I was reading Field and Stream Magazine a few weeks before and read an article about ice fishing. I followed the instructions in the magazine and made a trip wire I could set up that would detect a fish on the line, trip and set the hook. I just had to try it out.

I got on all of my warmest clothes and took the bus to Rt. 252. I walked to the Gradyville Rd. Bridge. The water around the bridge and bank was frozen solid. I tested the ice to make sure it was solid enough to walk on. There were a few fishermen out but they were few and far between. I found a place where the ice was thin enough to chop through. I began chopping a twelve inch circular hole in the ice which was at least four inches thick. I set up my gear and the ice fishing trip wire and put a fish egg on a small hook. I lowered the split shot weighted line in the hole and sat back on the bank. I brought a thermos full of hot Lipton's chicken noodle soup I prepared and brought along. I had a couple pieces of bread and was sitting on the bank watching my gear as I ate.

Suddenly, the device I set up sprang and I had hooked something. I was quite excited and ran out onto the ice and picked up my rod. It was a small thin rod with only four or six pound test line on it. I fought the fish carefully making sure the line didn't break on the edge of the hole in the ice. I actually caught an eight inch crappie. It was fat and meaty and was a pretty good sized fish. I really didn't want to take it home so I gave it to one of the nearby fisherman. He was amazed at how big it was. If you think about the risk I took going out to the lake alone and walking on the ice you'd think I was crazy.

After I got finished fishing I decided to take a short cut across the frozen lake. I walked on the ice about two hundred yards off shore and was crossing the frozen lake walking from Gradyville Rd. toward the bridge at Bishop Hollow Rd. This was really stupid because where the current was flowing under the ice it was thinner; only a couple of inches in places. As I walked there were several times the ice started to crack. The noise was unbelievably loud and it scared me half to death. The sound would reverberate across the lake. I would back up and try another route. I was too far out to turn back to shore. I continued walking looking for where the ice was thickest. I was lucky I crossed the ice getting closer to shore and finally off the frozen lake onto a path that took me to the bridge.

I could have fallen through the ice in a number of places where I was walking. I surely would have drowned. I never told anybody about my trek. It was stupid and I never walked on a frozen body of water again. However, that day was memorable. It was bitter cold but being alone ice fishing, catching a fish, and reflecting on the beauty of the frozen lake was a surreal experience. I'll never forget that day and I'll probably never be able to match the sheer terror of walking across the ice that day.

Conclusion:

One of the things that happen when a person does not have a trade, skill or a good education is underemployment and low wages. The fact is neither my father nor mother finished high school. It was through long hours of hard work at low wages that my father was able to raise our family. He often worked two jobs and worked well into his late seventies. He never had a retirement income other than social security. They never owned their own home and never bought a new car. However, my parents were there for each

one of us. They got older and were struggling in Upper Darby financially. Also, my sisters would drop off the younger kids for my parents to babysit. The cold weather got to their arthritis and they wanted to move. I was the last person at home until I went into the Army in 1975.

When I got out of the Army in 1978 my brother Brad heard from some of his friends I was headed for trouble. I was hanging out with some pretty tough guys I grew up with. He convinced me to move my parents to Texas. We moved to Corpus Christi where I started my career as a policeman. My nephew John and I graduated from the Corpus Christi Police Academy together.

As time went on and we went through our careers, a topic for another book, my parents grew old and they both passed in the early ninety's

My nephew John married raised his two children and is still on the Corpus Christi Police Department as a Captain. He is a dedicated father and loves his two girls and grandchildren.

I have been with my wife Frances for 27 years and moved to Uvalde and am the Chief of Police. I am blessed each day I awake and my wife is still with me. She has a multitude of illnesses from her heart to arthritis. I'll not go into detail but she is disabled and each day with her is a blessing.

The last things I want to mention in this book are the two subjects people do not want to discuss. I think there is an organized attack against Christianity and Judaism or basically any organized religion in this country. This is a well coordinated, well funded and well executed plan. My advice is to get to know the political system and vote.

Too many people take politics for granted and don't want to take the time to get involved. I myself want to preserve the democratic republic our forefathers set up for us. It will take getting the right people in local, state and national offices to keep this system. Believe me this system is under attack not only from those that would want us killed from across the world; but, from more than one group of organized whack jobs that live in this country.

I also recommend finding a church where you can belong, fit in and find people who believe in the same principles you do. There is only one God and his son Jesus died on the cross for our sins. I don't think God really cares what church you go to.

If you have young children keep them engaged as much as possible in organized activities. Don't let them sit in front of the television or computer talking to strangers. There are too many predators out there that want to take advantage of them. Not to mention the pornographic material they are exposed to.

I may be a right wing Christian but I know one thing. There is only a good benefit from having good solid morals and a strong Christian support system and family values. I say the pledge of allegiance with the belief in God and I say the Texas Pledge with the belief that God resides in Texas.

